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Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	10/29 Food safety system failed to stop epidemic
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SOURCE	https://www.propublica.org/article/salmonella-chicken-usda-food-safety?utm_source=sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=majorinvestigations&utm_content=feature
GIST	<p>In May 2018, a rare and virulent strain of salmonella caught the attention of America’s top disease detectives. In less than two months, the bacteria had sickened more than a dozen people, nearly all of them on the East Coast. Many said they’d eaten chicken, and federal food safety inspectors found the strain in chicken breasts, sausages and wings during routine sampling at poultry plants.</p> <p>But what seemed like a straightforward outbreak soon took a mystifying turn. Cases surfaced as far away as Texas and Missouri. A 1-year-old boy from Illinois and a 105-year-old woman from West Virginia fell ill. There was a teenager who’d just returned from a service trip in the Dominican Republic and a woman who’d traveled to Nicaragua. But there were also people who hadn’t traveled at all.</p> <p>Victims were landing in the hospital with roiling stomach pains, uncontrollable diarrhea and violent bouts of vomiting. The source of the infections seemed to be everywhere.</p> <p>Even more alarming was that this strain of salmonella, known as multidrug-resistant infantis, was invincible against nearly all the drugs that doctors routinely use to fight severe food poisoning.</p> <p>With a public health threat unfolding across the country, you might have expected federal regulators to act swiftly and decisively to warn the public, recall the contaminated poultry and compel changes at chicken plants. Or that federal investigators would pursue the root cause of the outbreak wherever the evidence led.</p> <p>None of that happened.</p> <p>Instead, the team at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention closed the outbreak investigation nine months later even though people were continuing to get sick. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees meat and poultry, was not only powerless to act but said nothing to consumers about the growing threat. So supermarkets and restaurants continued selling chicken tainted with drug-resistant infantis.</p> <p>And they continue to do so today.</p> <p>An eight-month ProPublica investigation into this once rare, but now pervasive form of salmonella found that its unchecked spread through the U.S. food supply was all but inevitable, the byproduct of a baffling and largely toothless food safety system that is ill-equipped to protect consumers or rebuff industry influence.</p> <p>Several European countries have dramatically reduced salmonella in poultry by combating it on the farms where chickens are raised. But over the past 25 years, the U.S. has failed to bring down the incidence of salmonella food poisoning — even as the rates for E. coli and other bacteria have fallen dramatically.</p> <p>Consumers may get the impression that the meat and poultry they find at supermarkets is safe because it bears the USDA seal of approval. But the agency doesn’t prohibit companies from selling chicken contaminated with dangerous salmonella like infantis. And even when people get sick, it has no power to order recalls.</p> <p>Instead, the agency relies on standards it can’t enforce and that don’t target the types of salmonella most likely to make people sick. The USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service, unlike its counterparts in some countries, has no authority to control salmonella on farms, where the bacteria often spreads. And even when there’s persistent evidence of contamination in a plant’s products, the USDA can’t use those findings to suspend operations. All the agency can do is conduct a general review of the plant, and that rarely leads to a shutdown.</p> <p>“It’s a system that’s untenable,” said Sarah Sorscher, a consumer advocate at the Center for Science in the Public Interest.</p>

ProPublica, as part of its food safety investigation, has created an online database that lets consumers look up the [salmonella records of the plants that processed their chicken and turkey](#).

Last week, after repeated interview requests from ProPublica and years of criticism from consumer groups, the USDA announced that it was rethinking its approach to salmonella. The agency didn't announce any concrete changes but said it would set up pilot projects and hold meetings in an effort to come up with a plan.

"Whether it should have been done sooner or could have been done sooner, the good news is we're doing it," said Sandra Eskin, the agency's deputy undersecretary for food safety. "We're going to really take a look at everything we could look at and, I hope, develop a different approach that winds up being more effective."

Scientific advancements over the last decade have provided the USDA with tools to identify the most dangerous strains of salmonella. But the agency isn't using those tools to prevent it from spreading in our food supply.

To piece together how food safety officials and the poultry industry allowed infantis to spread, ProPublica used the same genetic data available to the USDA and other agencies, analyzing seven years of infantis samples taken from food and patients and catalogued by the National Institutes of Health.

Through dozens of public records requests, ProPublica was then able to link the genetic information on those 8,000 samples to the foods that victims ate and the processing plants the chicken samples came from.

The analysis, along with hundreds of internal government records and interviews with nearly two dozen scientists, allowed us to uncover that the infantis outbreak never abated and has continued to run rampant through the chicken industry.

In fact, ProPublica found that more than twice a day this year, on average, USDA inspectors detected multidrug-resistant infantis in poultry that's genetically similar to the outbreak strain. Each month, the CDC continues to receive dozens of reports of people getting sick from it.

"Many people are still becoming ill, and some of them gravely ill," Robert Tauxe, director of the CDC's Division of Foodborne, Waterborne and Environmental Diseases, told ProPublica.

One internal CDC presentation noted that this single strain is "responsible for an estimated 11,000-17,000 illnesses per year." But the CDC is limited in its ability to protect American consumers from foodborne illnesses. It has no power to order companies to take action or to provide information that would help it solve outbreaks.

And the CDC, despite noting that the strain was "widespread in the chicken industry," took the spotlight off infantis when it closed its outbreak investigation in February 2019. Tauxe said the investigation ended because the agency had learned as much as it could. "That does not mean that the outbreak was over," he said. "In fact, we think it may still be expanding."

As the CDC has contended with infantis, the agency has held several private meetings with the chicken industry, which has publicly downplayed the threat of the strain and its ability to do something about it.

But since closing the investigation, neither federal health officials nor the USDA has said anything to consumers about what the CDC quietly regards as an "epidemic."

Marva Lamping knew none of this in July 2019 when she took her longtime partner, Arthur Sutton, out to celebrate his 70th birthday at their favorite Mexican restaurant in Bend, Oregon. As Lamping tested her luck at the restaurant's video slot machines, Sutton snacked on chips and salsa while waiting for a platter of chicken enchiladas.

That night, Sutton began vomiting repeatedly, his stomach aching so badly that he couldn't lay down. By the next morning, the pain was unbearable, and Lamping rushed him to the emergency room.

At the hospital, doctors would discover that Sutton's intestines were leaking. Again and again, surgeons opened his abdomen to repair the tears and cut out dead segments of his bowels.

Doctors had quickly identified the cause of Sutton's ailments as salmonella. But for reasons they couldn't understand, his body was wasting away.

None of the antibiotics were working.

Missed Opportunities

As sudden as the infantis outbreak seemed to investigators at the CDC, it wasn't the first time the government had seen this strain, known as Infantis Pattern 1080. In the three years before the outbreak started, USDA inspectors had found the strain 74 times. But they could do nothing to stop the chicken from going to supermarkets and restaurants nationwide.

By the summer of 2018, people all over the country were falling ill. And as investigators studied the cases, clues soon emerged from the USDA, which oversees meat and poultry, and the Food and Drug Administration, which regulates almost all other foods.

The FDA had received a complaint that a dog had recurring diarrhea after eating raw pet food, and samples of chicken-and-vegetable dog food tested positive for multidrug-resistant infantis. A few months later, a Chicago woman fell sick with the outbreak strain after feeding her dog the same brand. Could the pet food be the source of the outbreak? Possibly, but not all the victims had a dog.

There was another lead. Victims reported eating Perdue Farms chicken more than any other brand. Public health officials in Pennsylvania and Minnesota found the outbreak strain in packages of Perdue wings, thighs and drumsticks in three supermarkets. And when USDA inspectors found the strain in raw chicken, more than a quarter of the samples came from Perdue plants.

The FDA's investigation had quickly led to a pet food recall. But while the FDA prohibits salmonella in the foods it oversees — including dog and cat food — the USDA allows it in raw meat and poultry destined for human consumption.

When people fall ill, the USDA can only request that a company voluntarily recall its products. But to do even that for salmonella, regulators face a high bar: To ensure a strong case, they're expected to try to find a patient with an unopened package of meat that tests positive for the same strain that made the outbreak victims sick.

"Often, by that time, most of the meat that's going to be eaten has been eaten," said Sorscher of the CSPI.

In June 2018, what could have been a key piece of evidence surfaced. An Illinois victim who'd been hospitalized told investigators that he still had a package of Perdue chicken tenders in his freezer. The USDA could have tested the package, but nobody ever went out to collect it, he said.

Perdue did not respond to more than a dozen calls and emails seeking comment, and it didn't answer questions sent to top company officials.

Wade Fluckey, Perdue's senior director of food safety at the time, told ProPublica that the company was targeted because Perdue has better brand recognition than other chicken companies, which skewed patient interviews.

"I don't know that any one company could say they didn't have it," said Fluckey, now a vice president at a pork processor. "Had they focused on other places, they would have found the same thing."

While no company showed up more frequently than Perdue, food inspectors were finding the Pattern 1080 strain in dozens of chicken processing plants as well as raw pet food and live chickens. To investigators, that was unusual because it meant that the salmonella couldn't have come from a single company or chicken product. It had to be coming from somewhere upstream in the supply chain — perhaps the farms or the few companies that breed nearly all the nation's chickens.

The country's antiquated meat safety system virtually ensured it would be no match for a germ like *infantis*.

The USDA operates under a law passed in 1906, where inspectors physically examine every carcass for signs of animal disease, illegal additives and spoilage. The system didn't account for invisible pathogens like salmonella and *E. coli*, which had not yet been linked to eating meat.

That did not change until 1994 after four children died from eating Jack in the Box hamburgers. The USDA made it illegal to sell meat tainted with a strain of *E. coli* called O157:H7. But it didn't ban salmonella despite a series of high-profile outbreaks in chicken. Instead, the USDA required processing plants to limit how often salmonella was found on their products and began testing for it. Plants that repeatedly violated these standards faced a shutdown.

That powerful threat didn't last long. In 1999, a Texas meat processor challenged the USDA's authority to close plants, arguing that salmonella "appears naturally" in raw meat. Two years later, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed that Congress hadn't given the agency the power to regulate salmonella that's present before products enter processing plants or to deem a facility unsanitary based on the bacteria alone.

The decision, *Supreme Beef Processors v. USDA*, has left the agency gun-shy, according to former department officials and food safety advocates. And Mansour Samadpour, a microbiologist who runs a testing and consulting firm that works with the food industry, said the decision distorts the underlying science. Just because salmonella "colonizes" chickens' guts doesn't mean it's "the natural state of the animal," he said. "It's nonsense."

The court ruling severely clipped the USDA's powers. So it has tried to pressure plants to improve by creating standards for how often salmonella should be found. Plants are rated on the results, which are published online. Violating those standards doesn't carry a penalty, but it allows the agency to visit the plant and look for more general problems like unsanitary conditions. If they can document significant problems, the USDA can temporarily shut down the plant, though the agency rarely takes such action.

Today, food poisoning sickens roughly 1 in 6 Americans every year, according to the CDC, and salmonella hospitalizes and kills more people than any other foodborne pathogen. Each year, about 1.35 million people get sick from salmonella. While most recover, more than 400 people die and 26,500 people are hospitalized. Some are left with long-term conditions like severe arthritis and irritable bowel syndrome. Salmonella costs the economy an estimated \$4.1 billion a year, more than any other type of food poisoning.

Salmonella outbreaks have been linked to other foods like onions, but poultry remains the biggest culprit, and people are eating more of it than ever. On average, people in the U.S. eat nearly 100 pounds of chicken each year, a number that has grown by about 40% in the last 25 years.

Cooking poultry to an internal temperature of 165 degrees will kill salmonella. But studies by the USDA and others have found that despite decades of consumer education, home cooks routinely cross-contaminate their kitchens, and few use a meat thermometer to ensure their poultry is cooked properly.

Illnesses haven't declined even as salmonella rates in raw poultry have. And infections are getting harder to treat. The CDC recently found that salmonella infections were becoming increasingly resistant to antibiotics. In contrast, food poisoning related to *E. coli* O157:H7 has dropped by about 70%.

Consumer advocates, industry consultants and former USDA officials say that's because the agency focuses solely on whether salmonella is found in chicken or turkey at the processing plant.

This approach has been criticized for years. One former meatpacking executive called it "worthless." Even the USDA's own research arm has said the agency's measure for salmonella is "not a good indicator" of food safety.

The USDA doesn't consider two key risk factors: how much salmonella is in the poultry and how dangerous that type of salmonella is. There are 2,500 types of salmonella, but only a fraction cause the vast majority of illnesses.

The industry has greatly reduced the prevalence of one common type of the bacteria, known as salmonella Kentucky, which rarely causes illnesses in the U.S. But it's made far less progress with the types of salmonella most likely to make people sick, the ProPublica analysis found.

The rate of infantis, for example, has more than quintupled over the past six years.

The full extent of the salmonella problem isn't even known. The agency does little testing for salmonella to begin with. On an average day in 2020, the USDA took about 80 samples of raw poultry across hundreds of processing plants. But those plants slaughter more than 25 million chickens and turkeys a day.

In recent years, consumer advocates have recommended the agency ban the sale of raw meat carrying the types of salmonella that most often make people sick. That approach has contributed to improvements in Europe. In the U.S., the FDA has seen a dramatic decrease in salmonella outbreaks tied to eggs since the 1990s when it began targeting the most common type.

Last month, a few of the largest poultry companies, including Perdue and Tyson, joined with the CSPI and other consumer advocates to urge the USDA to fix the system. But the letter to the agency didn't outline specific reforms, and a consensus on salmonella regulations has long proved elusive.

The last push came during the Obama administration, but citing the need for more data, the USDA rejected a proposal to ban certain antibiotic-resistant strains. The agriculture secretary at the time was Tom Vilsack, who now leads the agency again under President Joe Biden.

As the food safety project director for the Pew Charitable Trusts before joining the USDA, Eskin also pushed for reform, but her efforts were met with resistance. With food safety directors from some of the largest companies, she helped craft recommendations to Congress to modernize the meat safety system, including setting new limits on salmonella contamination and giving regulators oversight of farms.

The group sought to enlist trade associations, which represent not only the biggest players but hundreds of other companies. But when it comes to regulation, divergent interests often leave the trade groups lobbying for the lowest common denominator. "They shut us down," she said in an interview before taking her government post. "They're the ones that blocked us — not the companies, the trade associations."

Asked what was standing in the way of change, she said, "I'll make it simple: Powerful interests in the industry do not want it."

"We Are Basically Only Talking About Protecting Industry"

Just months before the infantis outbreak started, the USDA gathered representatives from the food industry, researchers and regulators at the agency's brick-and-limestone headquarters in Washington to discuss a scientific breakthrough that one participant called the "biggest thing" for food safety in 100 years.

Whole-genome sequencing had given food safety researchers an unprecedented look at the DNA of foodborne bacteria. New technology, known as "next-generation sequencing," was creating a trove of new

information and revealing connections that could help investigators stop outbreaks before they spun out of control.

As stakeholders took turns presenting slides in the wood-paneled auditorium, some spoke of the possibility that genome sequencing might help solve the stagnant rate of salmonella poisoning.

The new technology would help identify pathogens in foods like raw flour, peaches and romaine lettuce that were once rarely seen as sources of outbreaks.

While whole-genome sequencing couldn't confirm the source of an outbreak without additional evidence, it provided powerful clues about the bacteria's genetic history that could point epidemiologists in the right direction.

But for all the potential, much of the conversation that day in October 2017 centered on how to make this scientific breakthrough palatable to industry. Trade groups had requested the meeting, and they voiced concerns about how the new tool could be used for enforcement or might inaccurately connect companies' products to outbreaks. Speakers, including USDA officials, emphasized the importance of proceeding with caution. They discussed strengthening firewalls to keep testing data private and establishing "safe harbors" from USDA enforcement.

During a roundtable discussion, one representative from the United Fresh Produce Association raised concerns about the idea of companies sharing genome sequencing data with the government. "I think right now, it's viewed as very one-sided," she said. "We see the benefit to the agencies, but it's less clear how a company would directly benefit."

The industry's influence wasn't lost on regulators. Former USDA officials hold key posts at some of the food industry's biggest companies. Indeed, two people who led the 2017 meeting for the agency now work for the food industry.

Sitting in the auditorium, Jørgen Schlundt, the former head of food safety for the World Health Organization, was growing increasingly frustrated. Schlundt had helped achieve dramatic reductions in salmonella in Denmark while working for the country's food agency.

"I understand that I'm in the U.S., but surely this must also be about protecting consumers," he told the audience. "We are basically only talking about protecting industry here. I thought that this was, the basic purpose was to protect consumers, avoid American consumers and other consumers from dying from eating food."

While the USDA tiptoed around the new technology, whole-genome sequencing, which is now used to solve criminal cases and track COVID-19 variants, would prove pivotal to the CDC's *infantis* investigation.

As the *infantis* outbreak spread, epidemiologists noticed something unusual: The outbreak strain, Pattern 1080, carried an unusual combination of antibiotic-resistance genes that looked similar to another strain they'd seen before, Louise Francois Watkins, an epidemiologist at the CDC, said in an interview.

At the time, the CDC was still using a method called pulsed-field gel electrophoresis, or PFGE, which produced barcode-like patterns from the bacteria's DNA that scientists used to connect cases. So the investigators asked the lab to line up the patterns and compare the two strains.

"And sure enough," Francois Watkins said, the strains were so similar, they differed by "only a single band" of the barcode. With that clue, they decided to analyze the strains using whole-genome sequencing.

That allowed scientists to compare the individual building blocks in the genomes of bacteria. And the *infantis* investigators discovered that not only were the two strains genetically similar but that PFGE was masking the scope of the problem.

In fact, Pattern 1080 was just one wave in a much larger surge of drug-resistant infantis — one that had been detected nearly a decade ago in Israel and was now circulating worldwide in countries as far apart as Italy, Peru and Vietnam.

One of the reasons the U.S. variant is so concerning is that it typically carries a unique gene that makes it especially hard to treat.

“It’s resistant to four of the five antibiotics that are commonly recommended for treatment,” Francois Watkins said. “The antibiotics that your doctor is going to pick when they suspect you have a salmonella infection are pretty likely not to be effective.”

The strain is also a major public health concern because it has the ability to pass those genes to other bacteria, adding to the growing global problem of antibiotic resistance.

“We don’t want to see resistance climbing in our food supply because it’s not going to stay in that one space,” Francois Watkins said.

Whole-genome sequencing had helped investigators discover that the outbreak was actually a widespread problem in the country’s chicken supply.

But even with these new revelations, public health officials still lacked one of the most basic tools to control the strain.

“A Gap in Our Regulations”

CDC investigators knew that infantis was spreading in chickens long before the birds arrived at the slaughterhouse. But enlisting the USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service would be a dead end because the agency has no regulatory authority over farms. The USDA can only force farms to take measures when animals get sick, not when humans do.

That also made it difficult for the CDC investigators to pursue leads involving breeders and feed suppliers to trace back how dangerous bacteria got into the food supply.

“That’s a gap in our regulations,” Tauxe of the CDC said.

Nearly all the chickens we eat descend from birds bred by two companies, Aviagen and Cobb-Vantress, a subsidiary of Tyson Foods. This breeding process has allowed consumers to walk into any grocery store and find chicken of the same quality. But that pyramid structure also makes it possible for salmonella to circulate since the bacteria can be transferred from hens to their offspring, and a single breeding flock might produce 3 million chickens over several years. (Both companies declined to comment.)

And nearly every step of their journey from chicken house to our plates presents an opportunity for salmonella to spread.

As far back as 2005, the USDA has held public meetings exhorting the poultry industry to take steps at the farm. It has recommended that farmers change or chemically treat the litter between flocks, use traps and bait to eliminate pests and vaccinate hens and chicks against salmonella.

Denmark, Sweden and Norway have largely eradicated salmonella on farms by keeping chicken houses clean, frequently testing the birds and destroying infected breeding flocks. The United Kingdom has dramatically reduced salmonella illnesses by pressuring the industry to vaccinate.

The structure of the U.S. chicken industry makes it ideally suited to implement such interventions. The same company that slaughters the chickens often owns the hatchery and feed mill, and it contracts with farmers to raise the chickens to its specifications. The catch is that because companies are essentially

doing business with themselves, there's little incentive for any of them to press others to reduce salmonella, the industry consultant Samadpour said.

"If it was four or five different companies," he said, "the processing plant would tell the farms, 'If you are more than so much positive, you can't send it here,' the farm would tell the hatchery, 'If the chicks coming in are positive, we are not going to take them.' They would tell the feed mill that if the feed is contaminated with salmonella, 'We are not going to bring it in.' Can you do that? No, it all belongs to you."

Because more isn't done on the farm, the birds' skin and feathers are often highly contaminated with salmonella by the time they reach the processing plant, according to the USDA. And in the plant, there are many ways bacteria can spread.

Birds can be further cross-contaminated when workers cut carcasses into breasts, legs and wings. The USDA recommends workers wash their hands and sanitize knives between each bird. But workers often have a few seconds to make each cut.

Ground chicken, which has become increasingly popular, is especially prone to contamination. Meat sent to the grinder comes from multiple birds, increasing the chance of cross-contamination. The fine texture of ground chicken can also get caught in small pieces of equipment, potentially tainting multiple batches. While salmonella is found in 8% of the chicken parts tested by the USDA, 25% of ground chicken samples contain the bacteria.

And when the USDA tested for salmonella during the infantis outbreak, more than half of the positive samples were found in ground chicken.

"The Company Can Do Whatever It Wants"

In July 2018, as outbreak investigators began to discover infantis in Perdue products, the USDA had a chance to press the company for answers. Routine salmonella testing had found that [the company's plant in Cromwell, Kentucky](#), was exceeding the USDA's salmonella standards, which say no more than 15.4% of chicken parts at a plant should test positive for the pathogen.

So USDA staff were sent to conduct an assessment of the plant, which might have seemed well-timed. Of the 76 plants where the infantis outbreak strain had been found, Cromwell, with 8% of the positive samples, had more than any other facility. But failing the agency's salmonella standard doesn't give the USDA the power to do anything more than review the plant's practices.

The USDA noted that Perdue had responded to its high rate of salmonella by adding more chemical dip tanks and sprays to disinfect the chicken. Because Perdue's internal sampling data showed the new steps appeared to be reducing the bacteria, the agency gave Perdue more time and recommended "no further action be taken."

According to the USDA report, Fluckey, then the food safety director at Perdue, told auditors that the agency's testing didn't paint an accurate picture of the plant because it wasn't measuring the quantity of salmonella. He added that Perdue managers hadn't concentrated on the salmonella types most likely to make people sick because they were focused on "meeting the performance standard."

A year later, USDA sampling indicated that the plant had continued to violate salmonella standards, with a third of chicken parts testing positive for the bacteria. In addition, the USDA said 12 of Perdue's samples were highly related genetically to samples from people who'd recently gotten sick.

Still, the agency once again deferred to the company's testing results, which showed a decrease in the rate of salmonella at the plant. The USDA decided it couldn't cite the plant and that no action was necessary.

ProPublica found that many plants have repeatedly violated the agency's standards without being shut down or facing any recent public sanction. According to the most recent data, more than a third of the

plants producing ground chicken are violating the USDA standard. And many large companies — including Tyson, Pilgrim’s Pride, Perdue, Koch Foods and the processors that produce chicken for Costco and Whole Foods — currently have plants with high rates of the types of salmonella most likely to make people sick.

Whole Foods said it has a team of experts who review the salmonella results of its suppliers and works with them to lower their salmonella rates. The processor, [Pine Manor Farms](#), said it has “worked diligently to make corrections.” Tyson and Costco declined to comment; Pilgrim’s and Koch didn’t respond to questions.

Other Perdue plants where the infantis outbreak strain was found also had a poor track record with salmonella overall. In the last three years, its plants in [Rockingham, North Carolina](#), and [Georgetown, Delaware](#), had more than 35% of their ground chicken samples test positive for the bacteria, and nearly all of them were types commonly linked to human illnesses. Yet neither plant has faced any recent public enforcement action, according to a review of USDA reports. (In April, ProPublica requested detailed files for both plants, but the USDA has yet to provide them.)

In an interview before she joined the USDA, Eskin said the consequences for companies violating the standards aren’t “anything meaningful in terms of enforcement.” “At the end of the day,” she said, “I think the company can do whatever it wants.”

The USDA doesn’t appear to have traced the supply chain for the plants that tested positive for the outbreak strain. Detroit Sausage had one of the highest numbers of samples with the strain.

Phil Peters, one of the owners, said he doesn’t remember anyone from the USDA asking the company who supplied its chicken. “I can’t control something that’s coming in from somewhere else unless I stop using it,” he said.

The company no longer produces chicken sausage because his clients no longer order it. But as a small processor, Peters said, he has little ability to demand chicken companies provide him meat carrying less salmonella. “They’re too big to worry about us,” he said.

A Hidden “Epidemic”

With no powers of its own and stuck with a hesitant regulator in the USDA, the CDC’s investigators needed the industry’s help.

On Aug. 8, 2018, the CDC offered a stark assessment of the outbreak to representatives of the industry’s trade group, the National Chicken Council: Drug-resistant infantis had become a “particular clinical and public health concern” because it was spreading through the chicken industry and increasingly making people sick.

The USDA seemed to take a less urgent approach. After an Aug. 16 foodborne illness investigations meeting with infantis on the agenda, an agency official wrote that there were “zero active illness investigations.” The USDA had begun tracing victims’ grocery purchases, but beyond that, it decided infantis was an “illness cluster” to watch — not a situation that required additional resources.

By then, three months into the outbreak investigation, neither the CDC nor the USDA had said anything to consumers.

People continued to get sick. Twelve days after the USDA meeting, a New York City resident began having stomach cramps. The patient’s spouse told investigators the victim had eaten and shopped in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. The patient went to the hospital but died two days later, the first known fatality from the infantis outbreak.

For nearly two months, there was still no public warning.

In October 2018, the CDC privately met again with the National Chicken Council. By then, public health officials were convinced that the outbreak strain originated high up in the chicken supply chain.

“The outbreak strain may be persisting in chicken populations, their environments or their feed,” according to the CDC’s presentation to the industry group. “Further investigation is needed to help prevent new illnesses and similar outbreaks in the future.”

The CDC drew up a list of questions for the National Chicken Council:

How was it possible that so many different companies could have the same strain of salmonella infantis? Were common sources of chickens, eggs or other farming products widely used? Would one or more companies be willing to partner with the CDC and USDA to explore possible connections?

The council didn’t have many answers. According to a government official’s notes, the industry said that it “does a lot to try to reduce salmonella across the board,” but that it didn’t have a specific preventative measure for infantis. An industry representative added that it “might have been helpful to have the discussion 4 years ago,” when the first signs of drug-resistant infantis popped up in processing plants.

A few days after the October meeting, a 2-year-old Michigan girl began rubbing her belly before developing a fever and diarrhea, making her the latest Pattern 1080 patient. Her parents said that before she got sick, she’d eaten chicken nuggets and touched a package of raw chicken in their kitchen.

The next day — more than nine months after the first patient from the outbreak got sick — the CDC issued its first public notice. By then, 92 people in 29 states had been infected with the outbreak strain. But the number was likely far higher: The CDC estimates that for every confirmed salmonella case, an additional 30 are never reported. That meant that nearly 3,000 people had likely been infected.

Though the CDC knew that infantis wasn’t a typical outbreak strain, the notice offered little advice to consumers other than to remind them to follow standard food safety steps when handling raw poultry. The CDC told ProPublica that there was little more it could say to consumers. Infantis was so pervasive, Tauxe said, that the CDC couldn’t tell consumers to avoid any specific kind of chicken or brand.

Instead, public health officials held another private meeting with the chicken industry in February 2019, telling trade organization officials that they considered this strain of infantis to be an “epidemic.”

The CDC emphasized how risky this particular bacteria was because of its resistance to first-line drugs used to treat salmonella, especially illnesses involving children and patients with blood infections.

Health officials also presented the clues that had pointed toward Perdue as a potential source of some of the illnesses. The agency wanted to sit down with Perdue, but with no power to compel the company to answer questions, it would be months before a meeting happened.

A little over a week after the February 2019 meeting with industry, the CDC closed its investigation. In its second and last public notice about the outbreak, it said 129 people had gotten sick, 25 had been hospitalized and one person had died. There was no mention of Perdue or any other company.

In ending the investigation, the CDC seemed to send mixed messages. While the agency noted that “illnesses could continue because this salmonella strain appears to be widespread in the chicken industry,” it also told Consumer Reports that the decision was prompted by a decrease in new cases.

Infantis Strikes Another Victim

Five months after the CDC closed the infantis investigation, Arthur Sutton and Marva Lamping walked into El Rodeo, a lively Mexican restaurant in Bend, Oregon, where copper art hangs on rustic yellow walls and red-clay mosaics line the archways.

The couple typically went there at least once a month after paying their mortgage or when friends were in town. Sutton’s stomach had been bothering him since eating there the week before, but he didn’t know

why. He decided he was up for going out anyway. It was his 70th birthday, and the couple always went to El Rodeo for their birthdays.

Lamping and Sutton had met 15 years earlier at the local community college when Sutton decided to put his past struggles with addiction to constructive use by becoming a counselor. After math class, a group of students would go out to a Mexican restaurant.

“He just one day said, ‘I noticed when we go out for nachos, that you don’t have a margarita with all the other ladies,’” Lamping said. “And I said, ‘No, I don’t drink and drive.’ And he said: ‘Well, I’ll give you a ride. If you’d like a margarita, I’ll take you.’”

Lamping, 63, was drawn to Sutton’s warm and accepting way of engaging with the world — a demeanor that seemed perfectly suited for his counseling work. Lamping said his clients clearly had a bond with him. Once, while he and Lamping were stuck in construction traffic, a former client working as a flagger recognized Sutton and came over to shake his hand.

Sutton, a large man with a square chin, broad forehead and glasses, was quieter than usual that night as a waiter brought out tortilla chips, salsa and a small oval dish of chopped cabbage slaw mixed with diced jalapenos, tomatoes and cilantro. Lamping went to play a few rounds of video slots in the back of the restaurant before dinner while Sutton dug into the salsa and slaw.

Those appetizers would take on grave importance for Lamping after Sutton developed severe food poisoning that night. She said that during its investigation of Sutton’s illness, the county Health Department would ask her if Sutton had eaten salsa and slaw, which an investigator later described in an internal email as the “likely culprit” behind multiple food poisoning cases connected to the restaurant.

El Rodeo’s owner, Rodolfo Arias, said he “didn’t know anything” about the investigation.

An inspection of the restaurant would find concerns with cross-contamination because El Rodeo thawed and washed frozen chicken in the same three-compartment sink in which it washed lettuce, tomatoes and cilantro. Inspectors also noted the faucet was “uncleanable” because it was wrapped in black tape.

Arias denied that his restaurant was responsible for Sutton’s illness. “I don’t think it was possible,” Arias said.

After dinner, the ache in Sutton’s stomach erupted. He began vomiting and couldn’t lay down to sleep. By the next morning, he could no longer stand the pain. He called Lamping at work, where she handles patient admissions at St. Charles Medical Center. She went home and took him to the emergency room, several hundred feet from her desk.

After a CT scan, a doctor diagnosed Sutton, who was obese and had other medical problems, with a hernia. He was discharged with plans for surgery.

But the pain didn’t go away. Ongoing diarrhea sent him to the toilet every 10 minutes. He tried to hide his pain, but Lamping finally convinced him to return to the hospital. “I’m looking into your eyes right now, Arthur,” she remembers telling him. “You’re dying.”

Sutton’s hospital stay, detailed in 2,000 pages of medical records provided by Lamping, would be marked by one wrenching episode after another. In the emergency room, when a nurse put a feeding tube up his nose, blood started gushing out.

Still, Sutton maintained his signature equanimity. Medical staff described him in notes as “very relaxed and accepting and taking it all in stride.”

Initially, the intensive care doctors thought Sutton was still struggling with the effects of a complex hernia. But in the operating room, it became clear that things were worse than doctors imagined. His bowels were

severely damaged. Surgeons set about removing dead segments of his intestines and reconnecting the functioning parts. They also noted that Sutton had an acute kidney injury caused by “profound” dehydration and septic shock from a widespread infection.

Over 16 days, Sutton underwent a similar procedure seven more times. Surgeons cut out pieces of dead intestine, centimeter by centimeter, and tried to repair tears and leaks in his bowels. Sutton was going in for surgery so often they placed a medical dressing over his abdomen so they wouldn’t have to cut him open every time.

Throughout, Sutton cycled through periods of decline followed by flashes of normalcy. Sleep-deprived, he began hallucinating that there were monkeys in trees and sailboats emerging from the ceiling. But he was also able to sit in a hallway chair in the sun with Lamping, eat a popsicle and jokingly tell the physical therapist, “You look like Tom Cruise.”

Still, Sutton was deteriorating. One day, Lamping found a note on the bedside table that Sutton had scratched out: “Why is this happening?”

Sutton’s doctors were also puzzled. After the first surgery, they’d quickly identified salmonella as the source of Sutton’s illness and immediately started antibiotics. But after nearly a week, they couldn’t understand why there was no improvement.

What Sutton’s doctors didn’t yet know was that a pernicious type of bacteria was poisoning Sutton’s blood: the strain of multidrug-resistant infantis circulating throughout the chicken industry.

To Industry, the Mystery of Infantis “Went Away”

A month before Sutton got sick, the CDC’s top foodborne disease experts held another meeting with the National Chicken Council. This time Perdue and four other big chicken processors were at the table.

Internal agency notes drafted before the meeting showed officials bracing for an unreceptive audience. “They have known about our concerns for years,” the notes read. “They know about European practices. As a member-run trade association, their position is often driven by the lowest common denominator. Business margins are ‘razor’ thin; some companies are unable or unwilling to embrace expensive control strategies upstream.”

During the three-hour meeting, the group discussed salmonella prevention and lessons learned from infantis.

But the CDC’s message — that infantis was a serious problem that demanded action — doesn’t seem to have resonated with Ashley Peterson, the industry representative who organized and attended the meeting. In September 2019, Peterson, the National Chicken Council’s senior vice president of scientific and regulatory affairs, told trade magazine Poultry Health Today that infantis wasn’t a problem anymore, according to a [video](#) of the interview.

“We don’t really understand where it came from or why it went away,” Peterson said.

Learning of Peterson’s comments, Tauxe of the CDC seemed surprised and puzzled.

“It didn’t go away,” he said. “We have met with the NCC repeatedly and have emphasized with them that it’s an ongoing problem. That’s wishful thinking of some kind.”

National Chicken Council spokesperson Tom Super said Peterson was referring to the CDC investigation ending and only learned later that the CDC was still seeing cases of infantis. He added that the industry has invested tens of millions of dollars a year in food safety and it has never downplayed infantis.

Swifter action might have made the difference for Sutton.

More than two years after Peterson's comments — as infantis has sickened thousands more people — the trade group still hasn't answered most of the CDC's questions about the strain and has shared little with the agency about efforts to curb it, Tauxe said.

"How it got into the chickens in the first place, and why it expanded across the country through the chickens and why it's persisting remain open questions for us," he said. "Stopping it is going to depend on what the industry is willing to step up to and do."

Super denied that the industry hadn't answered the CDC's questions but didn't provide responses when ProPublica posed them again. "The industry never stopped working to address salmonella infantis — an effort that continues today," he said.

Swifter action might have made the difference for Sutton.

At the hospital in Oregon, Sutton's prognosis worsened. By mid-August 2019, the doctors had learned that the type of salmonella ravaging Sutton's body was infantis. The finding might have helped doctors change course, but it was too late. The bacteria had already taken its toll.

Back in his room after a half-dozen surgeries, Sutton signaled to Lamping, waving two hands to show that he was done. "He just kept going: 'Enough, enough. No more,'" Lamping said.

She looked at Sutton and shook her head, refusing to give up. But there wasn't much the doctors could do. During his eighth visit to the operating room, a surgeon noted that the leak in his bowels was probably so deep that it wasn't accessible to surgeons: "Any further dissection would be significantly risking more bowel injury and making his current problem worse," the medical records said.

More than two weeks into his hospital stay, Sutton's salmonella infection had led to kidney failure. Sutton would need round-the-clock dialysis and a feeding tube to survive.

Lamping and Sutton's brother, Jim, gathered in Sutton's room to decide what to do. They agreed that Sutton wouldn't want to live constantly hooked up to machines.

They told the hospital to stop treatment and move him to comfort care. "Time for him to go to heaven," Jim Sutton said. After life support was removed, Lamping sat next to the bed and rested her head on Arthur's hand.

The next day, on Aug. 16, 2019, Arthur Sutton died. The cause was severe blood poisoning and acute organ dysfunction brought on by salmonella. Lamping was paralyzed by grief. Her visions of the future had always included him.

"I watched a man go from happy-go-lucky — someone who should have been with me another 20 years — I lost him," Lamping said. "I lost him."

Two years later, she still replays Sutton's battle with salmonella over in her mind, certain that something could have been done differently.

Lamping has focused on potential problems with how their food was handled at El Rodeo and hired a lawyer to file a lawsuit against the restaurant in 2020. She blames the restaurant, in part, because a county health inspection after Sutton died noted that it had told El Rodeo about the "findings from the state health lab on salmonella infantis cases." In court filings, the restaurant denied the allegations.

But Lamping also says there are things that food safety regulators and the industry could have done long before the chicken arrived at El Rodeo.

"If they know that infantis is in the chicken, if they know it's there, why are they selling it to us?" Lamping asked.

	<p>The USDA, to this day, has never said anything to consumers about the risk of multidrug-resistant infants. Because of the pandemic, Lamping and Jim Sutton have had to delay Arthur's memorial. They hope that someday soon, they'll be able to gather his friends and family on a hill overlooking a canyon in central Oregon.</p> <p>They'll walk through shale rock, wildflowers and junipers, and look over the canyon's edge where a buck can sometimes be seen running through the sagebrush. They'll open Sutton's urn and let the wind carry his ashes away.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Demand: EHA Wuhan virus data public
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/scientists-demand-see-wuhan-lab-coronavirus-data-ecohealth-alliance-1643775?utm_source=PushnamIMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=automatic&UTM=1635507739863&subscriberId=614e18b67aeb51cecbe2d56a
GIST	<p>Scientists have called on EcoHealth Alliance (EHA) to make its coronavirus research data public amid an ongoing debate over whether COVID may have originated from a lab.</p> <p>The U.S.-based organization has worked for years to research bat viruses with the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), which is based in the city where the first COVID cases were reported.</p> <p>Last week the National Institutes of Health (NIH) ordered EHA to hand over any unpublished coronavirus research data it held. The U.S. medical research agency accused EHA of failing to immediately report findings that showed how an engineered bat coronavirus made mice sicker than a normal version. The NIH said that not reporting this immediately violated the terms of funding it had given EHA.</p> <p>In a letter dated Tuesday seen by <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> and published on Thursday, Peter Daszak, the president of EHA, denied any wrongdoing on the part of the organization and said it reported the mouse data to the NIH in 2018 as part of its Year 4 report. He said the NIH did not raise any concerns at the time.</p> <p>Daszak confirmed EHA had this week supplied the unpublished coronavirus research data to the NIH as requested, including virus sequencing data as well as "new analyses." He said that these analyses were in the process of being made public following peer-review.</p> <p>The EHA president told <i>The Wall Street Journal</i> the organization intends to "get all of the work we did in China made public, through peer-reviewed papers as soon as humanly possible."</p> <p>But scientists have criticized EHA's decision to put its coronavirus research analysis through peer-review before making it public and demanded greater transparency from both the organization and the NIH.</p> <p>Angela Rasmussen, a virologist at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada, tweeted in a response to the letter: "'As soon as humanly possible' is not a timeline. There is no reason why sequence data from bat coronaviruses obtained in field collections should be withheld until peer review is complete.</p> <p>"This entire messy s***show is the result of EHA and NIH both not being forthcoming with data generated with taxpayer funding."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Children drive Britain's Covid surge
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/10/29/world/europe/uk-britain-covid-surge.html
GIST	<p>Britain is once again at the peak of a coronavirus surge, just over three months after all coronavirus restrictions were lifted on what Prime Minister Boris Johnson hailed as "Freedom Day."</p>

Cases have stayed at high levels since then, with more than 20,000 new cases recorded each day. There are almost 9,000 Britons hospitalized with Covid-19 — the highest level since March, when the United Kingdom was in the midst of a long national lockdown.

Unlike the rises and falls of previous periods of infection, the most recent wave shows the positive impact of Britain's vaccination rollout: Far fewer Covid hospital admissions and deaths have followed the rise in cases than in previous waves. Still, health experts contend that the ongoing hospitalizations and deaths are burdening overstretched hospitals and could be reduced with basic measures.

Tim Spector, a professor at King's College London, who has been leading a major study of Covid symptoms since the start of the pandemic, said that it is hard to predict whether high levels of transmission will continue. One reason for the uncertainty, he said, is that public behavior, led by government guidance, is very different now than in previous surges. "In past waves, there's been a general panic and reduction in mobility," he said.

"The trouble is that the government has gone from 'operation fear' that we had a year ago to 'operation complacency,'" Professor Spector said. "It's a massive switch."

England has some of the loosest coronavirus protections in Europe since July 19, when it lifted all legal restrictions, including mandatory mask-wearing. In a recent survey by YouGov and Imperial College London, 21 percent of Britons said they rarely or never wear a face mask in public — about four times as many as in Italy and Spain.

Despite the extended surge in cases, the U.K.'s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies recently said that behaviors in Britain are closer to prepandemic levels than at any time since March 2020.

The current surge is being primarily driven by high levels of infection in school-age children, with more than a third of all recent cases being reported in those under 15 years old.

Unlike most of Europe, the U.K. was slow to approve vaccines for adolescents. The recommendation of a single dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for 12- to 15-year-olds was not announced until mid-September — weeks after many students had returned to school from summer vacation. So far, just 21 percent of 12- to 15-year-olds are vaccinated in England, compared with 80 percent of adults.

Professor Christina Pagel, the director of the Clinical Operational Research Unit at University College London, said that the lag in approval of vaccines for 12- to 15-year-olds was an enormous mistake.

"We've had an extra 10 or 20 percent of kids infected when they didn't need to be, and we're dealing with the hospitalizations and deaths that came from that," Professor Pagel said. "And with long Covid, even if that affects 5 percent of them, that's a lot of kids."

These infections have started to spread into older age groups in recent weeks, and overall in England, about 20 percent of beds in intensive care units are filled with Covid patients. Experts warn that the National Health Service could face intense pressure this winter.

Modeling conducted by Airfinity, an analytics firm, shows that a double hit of Covid and flu cases could overwhelm U.K. hospitals by early 2022, with a severe flu season leading to over 6,000 hospitalizations per week for flu alone. In addition, the N.H.S. is trying to clear a growing backlog of 5.7 million surgeries, many of which were cancelled during the pandemic.

Experts agree that Covid vaccine booster doses — an additional shot given once the protection from the initial inoculation starts to decline — are going to be essential to reduce demand on hospitals in the coming months. A recent study from Public Health England found that protection against symptomatic infection drops significantly in the five months following a second vaccine dose.

The study found the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine's effectiveness at preventing symptomatic infection from the Delta variant dropped to 70 percent after five months from 90 percent two weeks after full immunization. Waning immunity was more severe for those who received the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine; five months after being administered, its effectiveness dropped to 47 percent from 67 percent.

The U.K. was among the early frontrunners of the global vaccine rollout. It approved the Oxford-AstraZeneca and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines in December, in both cases weeks before the European Union did. Its early deals with manufacturers also secured supplies of vaccines, allowing the U.K. to protect millions of its most vulnerable residents while the European Union engaged in a public dispute with AstraZeneca over delivery delays.

But this early lead is now coming at a cost, with a much greater share of the population at risk of waning immunity, adding urgency to its rollout of booster doses.

Booster doses are currently being rolled out to everyone aged 50 and above in Britain, as well as health care workers and the clinically vulnerable, six months after their second doses. So far, 6.7 million booster doses, or enough to cover 10 percent of the total population, have been administered.

The U.K.'s high case rates had been an outlier in Western Europe in recent weeks, as infections in France, Germany and Spain all plateaued at low levels. But rising cases in Germany hint that Britain's woes could spread across the continent this winter, with fears that waning immunity and increased indoor mixing will fuel further infection.

The British government has so far resisted calls to invoke its "Plan B" for suppressing infections over the winter. That protocol would include vaccine passes for nightclubs and concerts, mandatory face coverings and a push for those who can to work from home.

At a recent press conference, Sajid Javid, the health secretary, said that although the N.H.S. is under increasing pressure, he believed the current lack of restrictions remained appropriate. "If we feel at any point it's becoming unsustainable, then we won't hesitate to act," he added.

Dr. Chaand Nagpaul, council chair of the British Medical Association, pressed for more urgent action in a recent statement. He said the N.H.S. is heading into winter with a "depleted and exhausted work force" and called on the government to enact its "Plan B" measures now to prevent the N.H.S. from being overwhelmed.

The government is also facing mounting criticism after 43,000 people were mistakenly informed that they had tested negative for the virus. A private laboratory that was processing the tests in Wolverhampton, in the West Midlands of England, has suspended operations after an investigation by the U.K. Health Security Agency. Most of the recipients of the false negatives were based in southwestern England, which now has the highest case rates in the U.K.

Problems at the laboratory came to light when people with symptoms reported discrepancies between positive lateral flow tests — a type of rapid test that can be taken at home and has been made widely available by the government — and subsequent negative P.C.R. test results. Regular lateral flow testing is a critical part of the government's plan to get through the winter without reintroducing restrictions.

The latest data shows that almost one in four confirmed cases in England are first caught with a lateral flow test, which experts say is an important tool to find asymptomatic infections. Millions of these rapid tests are conducted in homes, schools and workplaces across the country each week, but only a fraction of the results are reported to the government.

Case rates have fallen in the U.K. in the past few days, although it remains to be seen whether this trend will continue once children return to school next week after a mid-semester break. Professor Pagel said she hoped the brief vacation from school would serve as a break in transmission. Still, she warned, "Even if

	cases do start declining, they're not going to go down super fast. If we added in masks and home working we could make them go down quicker, so why aren't we doing that?"
	She added, "Last winter was awful, and we shouldn't get anywhere near that level before raising alarm bells."
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HEADLINE	10/28 Virus infected huge numbers young kids?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/health/covid-vaccine-children.html
GIST	<p>A startling statistic emerged as advisers to the Food and Drug Administration on Tuesday debated use of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine in children ages 5 to 11. According to one federal scientist, by June an estimated 42 percent of these children had already been infected with the coronavirus.</p> <p>That figure was much higher than anyone expected. But the estimate, which was from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, might have overstated the percentage of children who were infected, several experts said in interviews. Among other flaws, the percentage was based on tests known to have a high rate of "false positives" — signaling the presence of antibodies where there are none.</p> <p>And even if unexpectedly high numbers of children have been infected, parents should not assume that they are shielded from the virus and don't need the vaccine. Immunization will cement that protection now and against future virus variants, said Scott Hensley, an immunologist at the University of Pennsylvania.</p> <p>"The data are clear that even if they had been exposed in the past that they would benefit from the vaccine," he said, speaking of children. "The risks of vaccination are very low, whereas the benefits are appreciable."</p> <p>Are 42 percent of younger children really immune to the coronavirus?</p> <p>Most likely, no. The C.D.C. estimate was based on tests of a small number of children who had blood drawn for routine medical care or other illnesses. That is not a representative sample of the general population, said Akiko Iwasaki, an immunologist at Yale University.</p> <p>For example, the sample may have included children who have cancer or other conditions that weaken the immune system. "Usually, kids don't get blood drawn for any routine medical care unless they have some reason to," Dr. Iwasaki said.</p> <p>Studies based on blood samples at clinics or by recruiting volunteers notoriously overestimate how many people have been infected, said Deepta Bhattacharya, an immunologist at the University of Arizona.</p> <p>"If you're not careful about doing a random sample, then the seroprevalence numbers can get pretty wacky," he said.</p> <p>For example, scientists examining blood donations estimated that about 76 percent of the population in Manaus, Brazil, had been exposed to the virus by October 2020, perhaps achieving herd immunity. That presumption turned out to be horribly wrong: Most of Brazil, including Manaus, saw a long and deadly wave of infections this year, which claimed more than 4,000 lives per day at its peak.</p> <p>The ideal way to estimate "seroprevalence" — the percentage of people with antibodies to the virus — is to randomly sample households, which is time-consuming and labor-intensive. And convincing large numbers of families to have blood drawn from healthy children is likely to be a losing proposition.</p> <p>In America, the percentage of children infected is likely to be lower than the C.D.C.'s estimate, because many of them were at home during the big surges, Dr. Bhattacharya said. The 42 percent figure "doesn't pass the smell test."</p> <p>I think my child had Covid. Can I find out before saying yes to the vaccine?</p>

If you don't already have evidence of your child's infection — for example, the result from a P.C.R. test — there is no reliable way to confirm it now. Covid symptoms closely resemble those of other respiratory illnesses.

"It will be difficult to ascertain who had infection and who did not," Dr. Iwasaki said.

And testing for antibodies after the fact is fraught. Apart from the possibility of false positives, the tests may not detect antibodies in children. Many never become visibly ill, and several studies suggest that people who are asymptomatic or have only mild symptoms produce far fewer antibodies than those who are severely ill.

"It's not clear to me that the serological tests can be used to faithfully identify people who have had exposures before," Dr. Hensley said. "I don't think we're at that point now."

I know my child had Covid. Does she still need the vaccine?

Skipping vaccination would be a gamble, experts said. There are many unanswered questions about the strength and durability of immunity in children.

"There are too many unknowns on that, whereas the vaccine is known — that's my caution," said Dr. Peter Chin-Hong, an infectious disease expert at the University of California, San Francisco. "Certainly, I wouldn't put all my eggs into the previous infection, natural immunity basket."

As with the protection conferred by vaccines, immunity from natural infection may weaken over time, leaving children susceptible to reinfection. "I'd be interested to know when that infection was," Dr. Chin-Hong said. "If it was a year or so ago, then I would worry about waning immunity."

In adults, natural immunity generally "seems to be holding up well," Dr. Bhattacharya said.

But it's unclear whether the protection seen in adults extends to children, in part because most children tend to have milder symptoms than adults and may not have mounted a full-throttled defense against the virus.

Natural immunity in children also may not hold up against variants. Several studies have shown that just one dose of the vaccine in a previously infected adult can turbocharge protection, even against variants like Beta and Delta.

"I suspect that will be the case with kids, as well," Dr. Hensley said.

Vaccination should also lower the chances of a reinfected child passing the virus to others who may be susceptible to severe illness. "If someone in your household is extremely vulnerable, then the consequences of that are pretty bad," Dr. Bhattacharya said.

I'm worried about side effects. Is the vaccine safe?

All of the evidence so far indicates that the vaccines are far safer than a bout of Covid, even for children.

For example, although the vaccines have been associated with the rare chance of myocarditis, inflammation of the heart, in young men, the symptoms have quickly resolved in most of them. Covid is much more likely to cause myocarditis, and a much more severe version.

"At the end of the day, acquiring immunity through infection is risky business," Dr. Hensley said.

Over the course of the pandemic, more than 8,300 children ages 5 to 11 have been hospitalized, and roughly one-third of them were admitted to intensive care units, the F.D.A. advisers were told. At least 94 children in this age group have died. Some continue to have symptoms weeks to months after the infection has resolved.

	<p>Federal agencies are continuing to collect safety information about the vaccines, Dr. Hensley noted, and will pick up any serious side effects that surface.</p> <p>For children who have a history of heart disease or do not respond to the vaccine because of certain medical conditions, there may be another option. Some companies are developing long-lasting antibody drugs that can significantly cut the risk of infection.</p> <p>AstraZeneca's antibody cocktail could protect recipients for up to a year, Dr. Chin-Hong noted: "That's the wave of the future."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Seattle breaks daily rainfall record
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/weather/weather-blog/atmospheric-river-rain-western-washington/281-7b315be2-6183-4f52-8d2a-8ccfd781025f
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Rain will clear up Friday morning in western Washington as an atmospheric river begins to move out of the area in time for the weekend.</p> <p>Atmospheric rivers are bands of atmospheric moisture that transport large amounts of water from the tropics and subtropics northward. They are the largest "freshwater" rivers in the world and can lead to major flooding when they stall over an area for several days.</p> <p>The weather system broke a daily rainfall record for Seattle on Thursday, according to the National Weather Service (NWS)</p> <p>"As of 830 PM this evening, Seattle had broken its daily rainfall record for today," NWS tweeted. "The previous record was 1.53" back in 1982. Today's total is 1.58" and counting. Bellingham had tied (and will likely break) their daily record of 1.24" set back in 1981."</p> <p>Flood Warnings for multiple rivers are still in effect, including the Stillaguamish River, the Skykomish River, the Skokomish River and the Tolt River which are all expected to cause moderate flooding into Friday.</p> <p>The North Fork Stillaguamish River, the South Fork Stillaguamish River, the Skagit River and the Snoqualmie River are all expected to reach flood stage and are forecast to cause minor flooding, according to the NWS.</p> <p>Heavy rain combined with fallen leaves led to flooded roads Thursday, which may continue into Friday morning.</p> <p>Standing water was reported over roadways in Kent and Tacoma.</p> <p>The heavy rain will also increase the risk of landslides across the Puget Sound region. A slide was reported on SR 20 on the North Cascades Highway Thursday evening. The highway was shut down for the night between mileposts 134 and 171 due to heavy rainfall through Friday morning.</p> <p>Before Friday afternoon, the atmospheric river will slide off to the southeast, drying out the skies and clearing into sunshine, just in time for a sunny, mild weekend for trick-or-treaters.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 More vaccinated dying from Covid
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/coronavirus/rise-in-breakthrough-deaths-should-not-cast-doubt-on-vaccines-experts-say

WASHINGTON (SBG) — Data from several states and the federal government suggests deaths among Americans fully vaccinated against COVID-19 rose sharply amid the nation's most recent surge of infections, but experts say that is not unexpected as more of the population gets immunized.

Between Oct. 11 and Oct. 18, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [cumulative count for breakthrough deaths](#) jumped by 51% from 7,178 to 10,857. Some conservatives and vaccine skeptics have pointed to the seemingly drastic increase to bolster arguments against [mandatory immunization policies](#).

"40% of all covid deaths last week were vaccinated. Stop vaccine mandates & forced masking," Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., tweeted in a post Twitter flagged as "misleading."

However, the CDC stressed the breakthrough data is not collected in real-time and it can take several weeks for a case to be reported, so the change does not represent a sudden week-to-week swell in deaths. The page tracking breakthrough deaths only includes data from 16 state and local health departments, and it is not intended to provide an exact count of U.S. cases at a given time.

"National surveillance relies on passive and voluntary reporting, and data are not complete or representative. These surveillance data are a snapshot and help identify patterns and look for signals among vaccine breakthrough cases," a CDC press officer said.

The death of [former Secretary of State Colin Powell](#) last week from COVID-19 complications despite being fully vaccinated cast fresh scrutiny on the risk of breakthrough infections. However, Powell was 84, had Parkinson's disease, and had been treated for multiple myeloma, a form of blood cancer that can weaken the immune system.

"Colin Powell was probably at as high risk as you could possibly be for a breakthrough infection with COVID," said Dr. Timothy Murphy, director of the Clinical and Translational Science Institute at the University at Buffalo.

Powell's death sparked a wave of misinformation and misleading memes on social media as anti-vaccine activists cited the failure of the shots to protect him as proof that they were not as effective as health officials claimed. Experts strenuously disputed that conclusion.

"I hope people don't take away from this that vaccination is not effective," Dr. Chris King, a transplant pulmonologist at Inova Fairfax Hospital in Virginia, [told WJLA last week](#). "I think that's the absolute wrong message. I think the overwhelming thing that's coming out of the data is that vaccination is effective."

[A CDC analysis](#) conducted in 13 U.S. jurisdictions as the delta variant began to spread between mid-June and mid-July found the fully vaccinated accounted for 16% of deaths, 14% of hospitalizations, and 18% of all new infections. Researchers said the frequency of breakthrough cases was higher than expected and reflected a possible decline in vaccine efficacy, but the vaccines still provided substantial protection against severe outcomes.

That trajectory continued through the summer. [In 16 jurisdictions](#) representing 30% of the U.S. population, the death rate among the vaccinated jumped from 0.1 per 100,000 people in late June to 1.2 per 100,000 at the height of the delta surge in August. Among the unvaccinated, though, the death rate per 100,000 people went from 1.9 to 13 during the same period.

According to a CDC report published earlier this month, 85% of breakthrough deaths in the U.S. through August occurred in adults 65 and older. Studies [have also shown](#) people with underlying medical conditions are at greater risk for severe breakthrough infections or death.

While research suggests breakthrough deaths and hospitalizations remain relatively rare, it does seem clear that they have become more common. Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan [said Monday](#) 30% of recent COVID-

19-related deaths in his state – where 86% of adults have received at least one dose of a vaccine – have been among fully vaccinated people with existing medical issues.

“The vaccines are outstanding, but they are not perfect,” said Dr. Martin Blaser, director of the Center for Advanced Biotechnology and Medicine at Rutgers University. “They offer a very high level of protection, but not for all people, especially people who are immunosuppressed, as Gen. Powell was.”

Readily available data on breakthrough cases [varies widely by state](#). Officials are often imprecise about when deaths occurred, warning of lag times of several weeks before cases are included in the total counts, which makes week-to-week comparisons difficult.

“You need to be careful because the way the counting is done can have a big impact on the numbers we see,” Murphy said. “It’s important to look at the trends as opposed to the individual changes that happen over short periods of time.”

[In South Carolina](#), only about 10% of COVID-19 patients whose deaths were reported in June were fully vaccinated, according to the Department of Health and Environmental Control. In August and September, the vaccinated accounted for about 25% of COVID-related deaths.

“We continue to see the majority of severe cases occurring among our fellow South Carolinians who are not fully vaccinated,” Dr. Brannon Traxler, DHEC public health director, said [earlier this month](#). “Not being fully vaccinated puts people at increased risk of being hospitalized or dying if they become infected with COVID-19.”

A report [from the Oregon Health Authority](#) last week also showed breakthrough deaths spiked during the delta variant surge, representing 21% of COVID-19 deaths in the state in August and September. Prior to the summer, fewer than 10% of Oregon virus-related deaths involved the fully vaccinated.

“The proportion of vaccine breakthrough cases who have died with COVID-19 has increased over time,” the report stated. “This trend is likely multifactorial and may be associated with increased COVID-19 transmission in our communities, increased disease severity associated with infection caused by the Delta variant, and waning immunity over time in elderly populations.”

In Minnesota, the Department of Health found breakthrough death rates remained steadily below 1 per 100,000 fully vaccinated people from May [through mid-September](#), while the unvaccinated death rate at times topped 10 per 100,000. Amid the delta surge in late summer, deaths among the fully vaccinated 65 and older more than doubled, but they were still about 20 times less likely than among the unvaccinated in the same age group.

“As more people become vaccinated, it is natural to see more cases of vaccine breakthrough (no vaccine is 100% effective),” the department said in its latest weekly update. “However, vaccines remain highly effective at preventing severe disease, hospitalization, and death.”

California similarly experienced a notable rise in hospitalizations and deaths among the vaccinated during the delta surge, but the spike among the unvaccinated was far more dramatic. [In recent weeks](#), the unvaccinated in the state were 10 times more likely to be hospitalized and 15 times more likely to die than those who were fully vaccinated.

The vast majority of the vaccinated continue to be protected from infection. In Washington, D.C., [breakthrough cases](#) at times accounted for up to one-third of new infections in August. However, fewer than 2% of fully vaccinated residents have been infected overall.

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy [reported Wednesday](#) that breakthrough cases represented about 21% of new infections in the state during the week of Oct. 4, but only one of the 124 COVID-19 deaths recorded statewide in that time. Since January, 0.004% of the fully vaccinated in New Jersey have died from the virus.

[The latest report](#) from the Ohio Department of Health indicates just over 2% of COVID-19-related deaths and fewer than 5% of hospitalizations since January have been among fully vaccinated individuals. [In Maine](#), though, about 20% of all COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths since mid-April have been breakthrough cases.

“When you do the math, you find that unvaccinated people are somewhere around 10 times as likely to die if they become infected as unvaccinated people,” Blaser said. “People should understand these numbers, so they can make decisions that will promote their own health.”

Other countries with high vaccination rates have seen similar trends: the vaccinated have accounted for a larger share of raw deaths in recent months, but their death rate is still considerably lower. [Data from the United Kingdom](#) indicates most COVID-19-related deaths reported in September were among the vaccinated, but death rates among the unvaccinated were still 2.5 to 9 times higher, depending on the age group.

“When you look at who’s dying, it is people who have underlying illnesses and the elderly,” Dr. Murphy said. “Those are the folks who got the vaccine the earliest and are likely losing a little of their protection.”

The latest guidance from the CDC and the Food and Drug Administration on booster shots underscores concerns that protection from the vaccines could wane over time. The agencies are now recommending boosters for the elderly and high-risk patients who received any of the three vaccines authorized in the U.S., and [CNN reported last week](#) they could soon call for anyone over 40 to get an extra shot.

“The evidence shows that all three COVID-19 vaccines authorized in the United States are safe – as demonstrated by the over 400 million vaccine doses already given,” said CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky in a statement. “And, they are all highly effective in reducing the risk of severe disease, hospitalization, and death, even in the midst of the widely circulating delta variant.”

Research from the U.S. and Israel has indicated the protection against COVID-19 transmission provided by the vaccines may fade after several months and an additional dose can help shore up immunity. However, there is still some debate among experts over how urgently boosters are needed and how much they would help.

A preprint study [published this week](#) in medRxiv concluded effectiveness of the Pfizer vaccine against infection declines by about 20% after eight months, but a third shot can bolster protection back to 87%. The authors concluded more immunization of unvaccinated people around the world would be the most effective means of containing COVID-19, but a booster dose for the vaccinated offers “sizeable” benefits.

“The only thing that effectively stops the virus in the long-term is immunity,” Blaser said. “The more immunity in a population, the higher the walls against viral spread.”

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HEADLINE	10/28 Skagit Co. flood warning: Skagit River
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/moderate-flood-stage-in-low-areas-and-sections-of-roads-along-skagit-river
GIST	<p>SKAGIT COUNTY, Wash. - The Skagit River was under a flood warning issued by the National Weather Service (NWS).</p> <p>The NWS predicted a moderate flood stage in low areas and sections of roads along the river from Rockport downstream to Sedro-Woolley.</p> <p>"31 feet for us is moderate flood stage, so that is enough to warrant concern but we're not expecting it to be a historic level," said Laura Han of Skagit County. "More than that could happen, less than that can happen and our natural resources team and our flood response team are keeping close contact with the</p>

	<p>National Weather Service, with the Army Corps of Engineers and the dam operators to make sure we have a good idea of what's coming."</p> <p>Han said the county's emergency response team was ready to activate if necessary. Flood impacts could last into the weekend.</p> <p>Meanwhile, on the roads, it was a messy drive in wet conditions. Washington State Patrol said it was responding to an increase in collisions on Thursday, including one on the Stillaguamish Bridge on I-5 in Arlington.</p> <p>"He was just going too fast, hit a pocket of water, lost control, hit the side of the bridge and according to witness almost went over the rail of the bridge into the river and that would've been about a 30 to a 40 foot fall into some pretty strong currents," said Trooper Rocky Oliphant.</p> <p>Trooper Oliphant said in these downpour conditions drivers should slow down, increase following distance and turn around if roads are flooded out.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Mason Co. flood warning: Skokomish River
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/mason-county-braces-for-wet-conditions-after-river-flood-warning-issued-for-skokomish-river
GIST	<p>MASON COUNTY, Wash. - The Skokomish River in Mason County is under a river flood warning until the early morning of Oct. 30.</p> <p>The river surpassed the 16.5-foot flood stage on Thursday and was forecasted to crest at 17.7 feet by the evening.</p> <p>Nearby properties and roads were already experiencing flooding from the river and heavy rains. High waters were spilling into Sandra Carney's backyard, just north of Shelton.</p> <p>"It's a little nerve-wracking at times because you don't know how bad it's going to get," said Carney.</p> <p>She and her husband have lived on the mouth of the Skokomish River since 1959. Carney said their home was built high enough to prevent water from flooding their house. However, she said water over the roads heading into town was becoming an issue.</p> <p>"We had to turn around and go back around," said Carney.</p> <p>Carney said she is more concerned about the other dangers caused by the wet weather.</p> <p>"You have to watch for slides and stuff because there was a big slide up here yesterday. And you just have to be aware of the weather and trees coming down," said Carney.</p> <p>Washington State Patrol alerted the public of a tree that fell on Highway 108 just outside of Shelton blocking both directions early Thursday morning. Crews removed the tree, but more rain saturating the grounds increased the risk of more trees coming down.</p> <p>"We check and make sure the roads are open before we go, which direction," said Carney.</p> <p>Officials are reminding people about the dangers of driving over flooded roads. They said it is uneasy to tell how deep the water is or how fast it is moving. Officials cautioned cars could get stuck, stall out or drift off the road due to flooding.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Flood alerts: Snoqualmie, Tolt Rivers
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SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/king-county-issues-flood-alerts-for-snoqualmie-tolt-rivers
GIST	<p>KING COUNTY - The King County Flood Warning Center has issued Phase 3 flood alerts for Snoqualmie and Tolt river, as heavy rainfall pushes rivers higher.</p> <p>Phase 3 means moderate to severe flooding is expected, with numerous road closures. Some levee overtopping can be expected.</p> <p>As of 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 28, the sum of the Snoqualmie River's three forks was 21,250 cubic feet per second (CFS), slightly higher than the Phase 3 flood alert threshold of 20,000 CFS. At these flows, flooding of varied depths could begin to occur across the Snoqualmie Valley, including potential impacts to some roadways that cross the valley, the county announced.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the Tolt River was flowing at 5,290 CFS at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, just above the Phase 3 flood alert threshold of 5,000 CFS for the Tolt. At these flows, minor flooding could be expected in low-lying areas upstream of Carnation, including areas along Tolt River Road Northeast.</p> <p>If a roadway is flooded, do not drive through it. Turn around and seek alternative routes.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 US to deepen relationship w/Taiwan
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/business-china-beijing-taiwan-taipei-71dc9bb8171c6459ae83e70b62f95904
GIST	<p>TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — The U.S. wants to deepen its relationship with Taiwan, the self-ruled island that has become a major point of conflict in the strained U.S.-China relationship, and will work to counter Beijing's "malign" influence, a U.S. diplomat said Friday.</p> <p>In her first public news conference, Sandra Oudkirk, the new director of the American Institute in Taiwan, the de facto embassy, reiterated that the U.S. remains deeply committed to Taiwan and is actively working on new areas of cooperation such as in cybersecurity and supply chains.</p> <p>"The value of our partnership and our support for Taiwan is rock solid," Oudkirk said. "We are committed to deepening our ties with Taiwan."</p> <p>The U.S. support for Taiwan comes as tensions between China and the island are now at the highest in decades, with Beijing stepping up its military harassment by flying fighter jets toward Taiwan. China has not ruled out force to reunify with Taiwan, which split from the mainland during the civil war in 1949.</p> <p>The U.S. switched diplomatic recognition of China from the ruling Nationalist Party government in Taipei to the Communist Party in Beijing in 1979, but has continued to maintain a strong unofficial relationship with the self-ruled island.</p> <p>Oudkirk declined to comment on any security initiatives or give any details about the presence of U.S. troops on the island, after Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen confirmed Thursday that U.S. boots were indeed on the ground, though less than what people would think.</p> <p>"We are going to continue to advance global and regional goals of the Biden administration, including countering malign PRC influence, recovering from the devastating impacts of the pandemic and addressing the threat of climate change," Oudkirk said.</p> <p>Washington has supported Taiwan with arms sales to boost the island's ability to defend itself, and also routinely navigates the waters around the island in what it calls freedom of operation movements.</p> <p>Oudkirk, who became director over the summer, also reaffirmed that the U.S. will support Taiwan in its role on the international stage, without giving details.</p>

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Tuesday called on other members of the United Nations to supporting Taipei's independent participation in international organizations related to transportation, health, climate change, culture and education. Taiwan, for example, is not a member of the World Health Organization.

China has already slammed Blinken's statement. On Friday, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said China is the "sole legitimate government" representing the whole of China, including Taiwan, in the international bodies.

"If anyone still tries to challenge the one-China principle and challenge UNGA Resolution 2758, they will only suffer an even greater defeat," Wang said, referring to the U.N. resolution that opened the way for China to join the United Nations.

A major new focus of the U.S.-Taiwan relationship is on supply chains amid a global crunch on computer chips known as semi-conductors.

Taiwan is home to TSMC or Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Inc., which is the biggest contract manufacturer of processor chips in the world. Those chips are used in everything from smartphones, medical equipment, to gaming computers.

In recent weeks, local media reported that Taiwanese companies are concerned about a request for information from the U.S. Department of Commerce to chipmakers on potentially sensitive information such as their inventory, production and their top customers. TSMC, for example, serves clients in China as well as across the world.

"I have stressed that the Department of Commerce's recent request for information is just that, it is a request," Oudkirk said in response to those concerns, saying it is voluntary.

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HEADLINE	10/29 Russia: another record as infections soar
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-russia-europe-vladimir-putin-76a3c0c43c1b43338f1c4a4f7a5ea108
GIST	<p>MOSCOW (AP) — Russia on Friday recorded another record of daily coronavirus deaths as authorities hoped to stem contagion by keeping most people off work.</p> <p>The government's coronavirus task force reported 1,163 deaths in 24 hours, the largest daily number since the pandemic began. The latest deaths brought the total toll to 236,220, by far the highest in Europe.</p> <p>To contain the spread of infection, Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered a nonworking period from Oct. 30 to Nov. 7, when most state organizations and private businesses are to suspend operations. He encouraged Russia's worst-hit regions to start sooner, and some ordered most residents off work earlier this week.</p> <p>Moscow introduced the measure starting from Thursday, shutting kindergartens, schools, gyms, entertainment venues and most stores, and restricting restaurants and cafes to only takeout or delivery. Food stores, pharmacies and companies operating key infrastructure remained open.</p> <p>Access to museums, theaters, concert halls and other venues is limited to people holding digital codes on their smartphones to prove they have been vaccinated or recovered from COVID-19, a practice that will remain in place after Nov. 7. Unvaccinated people older than 60 have been ordered to stay home.</p> <p>The number of new daily cases in Russia rose by 39,849 on Friday, just below an all-time record reported the previous day. The government hopes that by keeping most people out of offices and public transportation the nonworking period would help curb the spread, but many Russians rushed to use the surprise time off for a seaside vacation in the country's south or to take a trip to Egypt or Turkey.</p>

	<p>Authorities have blamed soaring infections and deaths on Russia's lagging pace of vaccinations. About 51 million Russians — just over a third of the country's nearly 146 million people — were fully vaccinated as of Friday.</p> <p>Russia was the first country in the world to authorize a coronavirus vaccine in August 2020 and proudly named the shot Sputnik V to showcase the country's scientific edge. But the vaccination campaign has stalled amid widespread public skepticism blamed on conflicting signals from authorities.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 China Inner Mongolia quarantines tourists
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-lifestyle-business-pandemics-travel-054245527b14ffa41aad670dabf48b16
GIST	<p>BEIJING (AP) — More than 2,000 tourists visiting China's Inner Mongolia region have been sent to hotels to undergo two weeks of quarantine following the detection of new cases of COVID-19 in the area.</p> <p>The move follows reports of an outbreak of COVID-19 in the vast, lightly populated region that attracts visitors with its mountains, lakes and grasslands.</p> <p>An announcement from the regional government on Friday said 2,428 visitors had been placed under observation at hotels in the cities of Baotou and Ordos.</p> <p>That came after successive reports of new cases of local infection in the region, with Inner Mongolia accounting for 19 of the 48 new cases of domestic transmission announced Friday.</p> <p>The quarantines are typical of the strict measures China has taken to control the pandemic, which also include mask wearing, electronic case tracing, mass testing, lockdowns and vaccinations.</p> <p>In the city of Lanzhou, in Gansu province bordering Inner Mongolia, millions of people have been largely confined to their homes over the past week after cases were detected there. Ten new cases were reported in the city on Friday.</p> <p>China has reported 4,636 deaths among 91,665 cases of COVID-19 recorded in the country since the first infections were detected in the central Chinese city of Wuhan in late 2019.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 General: China military progress 'stunning'
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/28/politics/hyten-stunning-china-military-progress/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)In the wake of China's test of a hypersonic missile, the second most senior US general said Thursday that the pace at which China's military is developing capabilities is "stunning" while US development suffers from "brutal" bureaucracy.</p> <p>The outgoing Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John Hyten, echoed Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's characterization of China as a "pacing threat" while calling Russia the most imminent threat.</p> <p>"Calling China a pacing threat is a useful term because the pace at which China is moving is stunning," Hyten told reporters at a Defense Writers Group roundtable Thursday morning. "The pace they're moving and the trajectory they're on will surpass Russia and the United States if we don't do something to change it. It will happen. So I think we have to do something."</p> <p>"It's not just the United States but the United States and our allies because that's the thing that really changes the game," Hyten added. "If it's the United States only, it's going to be problematic in five years. But if it's the United States and our allies I think we can be good for a while."</p>

Hyten's comments come a week after a US [hypersonic test failed](#) and as tensions between the US and China remain high over the issue of Taiwan. He reiterated US concern voiced by his direct superior, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley, about the recently reported Chinese hypersonic test which Milley called "very close" to a "Sputnik moment."

When asked about the initial Financial Times report on the [hypersonic test](#), China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Zhao Lijian said the August test was "a spacecraft, not a missile."

Hyten said his successor will need to focus on 'speed'

Hyten is set to retire next month and, in what will likely be some of his last public remarks as Vice Chairman, he encouraged his as-yet-unnamed successor "in everything that he touches to focus on speed and re-inserting speed back in the process of the Pentagon." Hyten previously served as commander of US Strategic Command, where he was in charge of the nation's nuclear stockpile and monitored strategic threats to the United States.

"Although we're making marginal progress, the Department of Defense is still unbelievably bureaucratic and slow," Hyten said. "We can go fast if we want to but the bureaucracy we put in place is just brutal."

Hyten declined to elaborate on what's known about China's hypersonic missile test over the summer, simply confirming that a test occurred and "it's very concerning."

But he made clear that Russia is the most imminent threat to the US because of their more than 1500 deployed nuclear weapons, saying that China has roughly 20 percent of that.

The hypersonic and nuclear weapons China are building, Hyten said, are only partially to do with Taiwan. Rather, they're "meant for the United States of America."

"We have to assume that, and we have to plan for that, and we have to be ready for that, and that's the position they're putting us in with the weapons they're building."

Earlier on Thursday China reiterated its long-standing opposition to any official and military contact between the United States and Taiwan, responding to Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's remarks during a CNN [exclusive interview](#). Speaking with CNN Tuesday, Tsai became the first Taiwan leader in decades to confirm the presence of US troops on the island for training purposes and said the threat from Beijing is growing "every day."

"The Chinese military capabilities are much greater than that" single test, Milley told Bloomberg News. "They're expanding rapidly in space, in cyber and then in the traditional domains of land, sea and air."

US has carried nine hypersonic tests compared to 'hundreds' by China

Hyten pointed to the development of hypersonic weapons to highlight the stark difference in approaches by the US and China. He said the US has carried out nine hypersonic tests in around the last five years while the "Chinese have done hundreds."

"Single digits versus hundreds is not a good place," Hyten said. "Now it doesn't mean that we're not moving fast in the development process of hypersonics, what it does tell you is that our approach to development is fundamentally different."

Hyten also criticized the American attitude toward failure, arguing that it has curtailed development.

"We've decided that failure is bad," Hyten said. "Nope, failure is part of the learning process. And if you want to get back to speed, you better figure out how to put speed back into [sic] and that means taking risk and that means learning from failures and that means failing fast and moving fast."

	<p>A failed test of a hypersonic glide vehicle last week underscored Hyten's point. A rocket booster, used to accelerate a glide vehicle to hypersonic speeds, failed, the Pentagon said, and the rest of the test could not proceed. Officials have started a review of the test to find out why the rocket booster failed, and there is not currently a scheduled date for another test.</p> <p>North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, meanwhile, has learned the lesson of failed tests to speed up development, Hyten argued.</p> <p>Unlike Kim Jong Un's father, Hyten said, "He decided not to kill scientists and engineers when they failed, he decided to encourage it and let them learn by failing. And they did. So the 118th biggest economy in the world -- the 118th -- has built an ICBM nuclear capability because they test and fail and understand risk."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Used car market goes 'bananas'
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/money/news/bidding-war-over-a-two-year-old-minivan-used-car-market-goes-bananas-over-lack-of-supply/ar-AAQ3izR
GIST	<p>LAWRENCEVILLE, N.J. — The 2019 Honda Civic that kicked off a used-car auction earlier this month would have been nothing special before the pandemic. But as automotive dealer Brad Wimmer watched, the online bidding quickly became, to quote him, “bananas.”</p> <p>As a new car, the Civic would have had a sticker price of around \$21,000. But within seconds at the wholesale auction, the two-year-old model, with 4,000 miles, sold for \$27,200.</p> <p>Soon after, a Nissan Rogue fetched what it would have cost new in 2018. A three-year old Toyota Camry with large dents and scratches on its hood sold for \$14,200, nearly twice what it would have brought just a few years ago. And a 2015 Kia Sorento sold for \$12,600, a staggering amount for a six-year-old car with 83,000 miles.</p> <p>For Wimmer, owner of the dealer AutoLenders, such sky-high prices have become the norm at the weekly auction, where dealerships nationwide buy and sell used cars.</p> <p>The unraveling of the used-car market is the most tangible result of a problem that has plagued the global economy for the past year: a dire shortage of computer chips that has hobbled auto manufacturing.</p> <p>The lack of new cars hitting the market has caused a shortage of used cars, too, raising prices and crimping sales. The crisis has created a political headache for the Biden administration, fueling inflation and knocking more than two percentage points from GDP growth in the third quarter. It’s also hurting consumers, who face long waits for new cars and can’t fall back on the used-car market as a low-price alternative.</p> <p>“It’s going to be really, really tough for consumers to buy a vehicle in 2022, a used or a new car. You’re going to have to pay a very high sticker price,” Wimmer said as he watched the auction, which used to attract more than 1,000 car dealers to Manheim, Pa., every week but since the pandemic mostly operates online.</p> <p>Demand for chips, also known as semiconductors, is soaring as more electronic products require the components to function. The pandemic accelerated demand as consumers gobbled up new computers and household goods. But chip supply is limited by a lack of semiconductor factories and by the months-long process needed to make the components.</p> <p>That’s forced automakers worldwide to slash production because they can’t get enough chips to power all the newest technology in their cars. The global auto industry will produce nearly 4 million fewer vehicles than planned this year because of the shortages, according to the consulting firm AlixPartners. By July,</p>

U.S. dealers had only 1.2 million new cars on their lots, down from 3.5 million before the pandemic, according to data provider Cox Automotive.

With far fewer new cars hitting the market, consumer prices for used cars have soared by more than 24 percent in the United States over the past year, while new-car prices are up nearly 9 percent, [according to the Labor Department](#).

Those jumps have fueled [eye-popping prices for rental cars](#), and [helped push U.S. inflation to a 13-year high](#) of 5.4 percent.

[Semiconductor shortage that has hobbled manufacturing worldwide is getting worse](#)

Poorer households are especially likely to feel the burden of pricier used cars, said Michael Hicks, an economics professor at Ball State University in Muncie, Ind. They often own older cars more apt to break down, but will struggle to replace them at current prices, he said.

If high prices continue, they could also become a drag on employment. “If this is still a story in October 2022, there could be a number of people finding it difficult to get to work because they can’t find the automobiles they need,” Hicks said.

The pricing frenzy has made for a “grueling” car search, Elvalynne Pala said while collecting a 2018 Honda CRV from the AutoLenders dealership where Wimmer watched the auction.

“If you don’t get the car immediately, somebody’s buying it right out from under you,” said Pala, a resident of nearby Bucks County, Pa. “I almost had the problem with this car. And it just seems like people are buying without even seeing the vehicles.”

She spent about \$27,000 on her SUV, which has 23,000 miles on it. That was a few thousand dollars over her budget, but the best deal she could find after weeks of looking on CarMax and CarGurus, she said.

Another customer arriving to peruse models, Gunjan Mukheja, said she began searching last month, after her car was totaled in an accident.

“I entered this car market like, oh my God, this is worse than the house market,” she said. “It is crazy, so crazy.”

One of the main factors inflating prices: Rental-car companies for the first time have become major buyers of used cars at auction, instead of big sellers. That’s because they can’t get enough new vehicles and are desperate to fill their fleets, industry executives say.

Normally, Hertz and other rental companies buy new cars directly from manufacturers, receiving discounts because they buy in bulk. But automakers lately have pushed rental companies to the back of the line and prioritized deliveries to dealerships that have customers waiting, said Grace Huang, president of Manheim, the company that runs the weekly used-car auction.

Nearly every decent used car at the Oct. 15 auction attracted a flurry of bids from big rental-car companies and national retailers such as Carvana, which had deep enough pockets to outbid local dealerships every time.

“Hertz, Carvana, Avis, Hertz,” Wimmer said as he watched the offers flood in for a 2019 Acura RDX. The car, which would have fetched \$37,500 when it was new, finally sold to Enterprise for \$40,200.

A two-year-old minivan prompted feverish competition before Hertz won it for \$39,200, a few thousand dollars over its original sticker price.

While that cost may seem high, “they’re going to rent that for \$700 a day in Orlando,” said Wimmer’s colleague, Greg Markus. (Actual Hertz price for a seven-seat minivan in Orlando with early November pickup: about \$416 per day or \$1,769 per week, according to the company website).

Hertz and Avis didn’t respond to requests for comment. Enterprise said it “will continue to work through all channels” to meet demand for rental cars. “Auction is one of our sources, however this is a limited resource given our requirements on age and mileage,” the company said in an emailed statement.

The chip and related auto shortage has fueled higher rental prices and caused some travelers to cancel their trips. Amy Weisenburger, a finance professional near Buffalo, N.Y., was planning an August vacation in Alaska with her husband to celebrate their anniversary. They booked flights and sketched out an itinerary but gave up after searching in vain for a car.

When her husband checked various sites, the cheapest deal he could find would have cost \$3,000 for nine days. A few days later, Amy checked several pickup locations in Alaska but found no inventory at all.

As a last resort she tried Turo.com, a kind of Airbnb for cars that allows consumers to rent other people’s wheels. All she found were pricey offers for a Honda Civic or an older BMW, which she worried would have trouble navigating rougher roads. “I was like, ‘I’m not driving a BMW to Denali,’” she said.

With new cars in scarce supply, many consumers are buying their leased cars instead of returning them when the lease runs out. That’s cut off a big source of supply for the used-car market, according to Huang, the Manheim president.

The supply constraints have left local dealerships desperate for any vehicles, new or used.

A few doors down from AutoLenders, another dealership, Route 1 Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram of Lawrenceville, has about half its normal inventory in stock, said Chris Mazzeo, manager for used cars. With new vehicles scarce, the dealership is trying to obtain more used cars, but is having to pay about 20 percent more than it did before the coronavirus pandemic.

Route 1 has taken out ads offering to buy consumers’ used cars, even if they aren’t looking to buy a new vehicle, Mazzeo said. Other dealerships in the area are doing the same.

Some customers are aware of the semiconductor shortage, but many aren’t, he said.

“The person that buys a car every 10 years is walking in thinking — and rightfully so — hey, let me negotiate a new car,” he said. When they see the prices, some think “that this is a game we’re playing. We’re just trying to stay in business.”

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HEADLINE	10/28 Home heating prices skyrocketing
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/28/business/inflation-natural-gas-biden/index.html
GIST	<p>New York (CNN Business)Americans are already dealing with sticker shock at the grocery store and when filling up at the pump. Next up: Home heating bills.</p> <p>US households that rely on natural gas for heating will spend an average of \$746 to heat their homes this winter, up 30% from last winter, according to the Energy Information Administration. Retail natural gas prices are expected to hit the highest levels since the winter of 2005-2006.</p> <p>That's because the era of dirt-cheap natural gas — the most common fuel used to heat US homes — is over, for now at least. Natural gas futures have spiked 132% so far this year, recently touching levels unseen since 2008.</p>

Industry experts warn that natural gas futures, and retail prices, could go even higher if it's a very cold winter and Americans are forced to crank up the furnace.

"We're going to be at the mercy of Mother Nature," said Rob Thummel, senior portfolio manager at energy investment firm TortoiseEcofin.

The natural gas price spike threatens to add to the rising cost of living for everyday Americans and [exacerbate inflationary pressures](#) gripping the US economy. And industry analysts say President Joe Biden has few — if any — good options to address high natural gas prices.

If it does look to be a frigid winter, natural gas futures could "absolutely" double from current levels, Thummel said.

However, such a spike would most likely be temporary until temperatures warm up and suppliers are incentivized to increase output.

Elon Musk briefly worth more than ExxonMobil

Part of the problem is that although demand for natural gas has rebounded as the US economy has reopened from Covid shutdowns, supply has been slower to return.

One issue is that Hurricane Ida knocked offline the vast majority of oil and natural gas production in the Gulf of Mexico.

Another obstacle holding back supply: natural gas producers are focused on paying down debt and living within their means, according to Christopher Louney, vice president of global commodity strategy at RBC Capital Markets.

"It's been a period of stubborn production growth," Louney said.

Investors are also leery of providing more capital to oil-and-gas companies after the industry struggled mightily for the past decade. Energy was the S&P 500's [worst performing sector of the last decade](#) — by a long shot.

Under pressure from the sustainable investing movement, many investors would prefer to deploy capital to companies that are viewed as being a permanent part of the solution to the climate crisis. That's one reason [Elon Musk's net worth recently surpassed](#) the market valuation of ExxonMobil ([XOM](#)), a stunning feat that seemed impossible just a few years ago.

"The pool of capital has grown more wary of investment in fossil fuels," said Ira Joseph, global head of generating fuels and electricity pricing at S&P Global Platts. "The hot market has shifted from oil and gas to green portfolios: solar, wind turbines and battery storage."

Private-equity billionaire warns of social unrest

Blackstone ([BX](#)) CEO Stephen Schwarzman said it's getting harder for fossil fuel companies to borrow money to fund their expensive production projects, especially in the United States.

"If you try and raise money to drill holes, it's almost impossible to get that money," the private-equity billionaire told CNN International's Richard Quest this week at an investment conference in Saudi Arabia. Schwarzman [warned energy prices could get so high](#) that there will be "real unrest" that "challenges the political system."

Natural gas prices have [skyrocketed much higher](#) in Europe and Asia. It has gotten to the point where some [factories in Europe have been forced to shut down](#) because they can't pay the gas bill. China has resorted to [rationing electricity, resulting in blackouts](#).

The gas shortage overseas may be helping to drive up US natural gas futures — even though that's not justified.

"This market is bid on hysteria over the eurozone and Asia," said Robert Yawger, director of energy futures at Mizuho Securities USA.

US not running out of gas

The good news is that even if it's an extremely cold winter, the United States is not going to run out of natural gas. That's in large part because America is the world's leading producer of the fuel. And while natural gas inventories are lower than usual, they are not at alarming levels.

"There is no shortage here," said Yawger, adding that there is a "zero percent chance" that the country runs out of natural gas.

And if this winter turns out to be warmer-than-usual, as [government forecasters predict](#), natural gas futures could plunge.

In that scenario, Yawger said US natural gas futures could tumble back to the range of \$3-\$4 per million British Thermal Units (BTUs) — down by as much as half from current levels.

Still, today's high natural gas prices are complicating the inflation outlook and casting further doubt on predictions from the Biden administration and Federal Reserve that the current price spikes would be a temporary phenomenon.

"Inflation is definitely more than transitory," BlackRock ([BLK](#)) CEO Larry Fink said this week at the investment conference. "We're in a new regime."

'There is no OPEC to call'

Asked about high natural gas prices, a White House official told CNN that Biden has directed his administration to monitor the supply of natural gas and take action to ensure families have access to the gas they need.

"We are particularly focused on the possibility of limited supply and storage in the northeast, which historically faces the highest prices," the White House official said.

The American Rescue Plan, passed by Congress in March, included \$4.5 billion in energy assistance funding for low-income families. The White House promised to work directly with states to get this funding to households facing high costs this winter.

But the Biden administration has few if any options to combat high natural gas prices, at least in the short term.

Unlike with oil, the United States does not have an emergency stockpile of natural gas it can release to cool off prices. And there is no cartel of producers with whom Biden officials can negotiate to produce more gas (not that that strategy has worked on the oil front recently).

"There is no OPEC to call," said Thummel, the TortoiseEcofin portfolio manager.

In theory, the Biden administration could encourage more domestic production by relaxing environmental regulations. But such a move would take time to impact supply as well as undercut Biden's climate agenda, the most progressive in US history.

In fact, these concerns about a shortage of natural gas are emerging just days before Biden travels to Scotland for COP26, an international summit aimed at weaning the world off fossil fuels.

HEADLINE	10/29 DC judge bars firing unvaccinated workers
SOURCE	https://www.foxnews.com/politics/biden-admin-vaccine-employees-judge-injunction
GIST	<p>A Washington, D.C., district court judge issued a temporary restraining order Thursday that prevents both civilian and active-duty military plaintiffs from being terminated after they sued the Biden administration over religious exemptions to COVID-19 vaccines.</p> <p>"None of the civilian employee plaintiffs will be subject to discipline while his or her request for a religious exception is pending," District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly ordered, according to a Minute Order obtained by Fox News.</p> <p>The judge also ruled that "active duty military plaintiffs, whose religious exception requests have been denied, will not be disciplined or separated during the pendency of their appeals."</p> <p>The court further ordered the defendants in the Biden administration to file a supplemental notice by noon on Friday that indicates whether they will agree that no plaintiff will be disciplined or terminated pending the court's ruling.</p> <p>Twenty plaintiffs sued President Biden and members of his administration in their official capacity over the president's Sept. 9 executive order mandating vaccines for federal employees, according to civil action filed Sunday.</p> <p>"The Biden administration has shown an unprecedented, cavalier attitude toward the rule of law and an utter ineptitude at basic constitutional contours," said the plaintiffs' attorney Michael Yoder in a statement to Fox News.</p> <p>"This combination is dangerous to American liberty," Yoder continued. "Thankfully, our Constitution protects and secures the right to remain free from religious persecution and coercion. With this order, we are one step closer to putting the Biden administration back in its place by limiting government to its enumerated powers. It's time citizens and courts said no to tyranny. The Constitution does not need to be rewritten, it needs to be reread."</p> <p>The lawsuit is the latest the administration faces amid growing claims that its vaccine mandates are unconstitutional.</p> <p>The court order came the same day that Gov. Ron DeSantis, R-Fla., announced that his state filed a lawsuit against the Biden administration over its vaccine mandate for federal contractors.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 US missile defense handle China missiles?
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20211028-can-u-s-missiledefense-systems-handle-china-s-new-missiles
GIST	<p>A pair of reports in the <i>Financial Times</i> have set the defense community abuzz with the suggestion that China has tested a new hypersonic glide vehicle, possibly with a fractional orbital bombardment system, or FOBS. Two possible tests—one potentially as early as 27 July and a second on 13 August—involved a Chinese Long March 2C orbital launch vehicle blasting off and flying a south polar trajectory into low-earth orbit. The rocket released a hypersonic glide vehicle that circled the globe in low polar orbit before de-orbiting and landing several kilometers from its target. China claims that it was a test of a spaceplane under its Tengyun program, but the nominated date of 16 July doesn't match up with the launch activity observed later that month and in August.</p> <p>FOBS is not a new idea. The Soviet Union explored the possibility of firing ballistic missiles over Antarctica to attack the United States from the south, rather than from the north over the Arctic, during the Cold War. An early system was deployed but soon withdrawn from service when Soviet efforts turned to modernizing their intercontinental ballistic missile force and introducing independently manoeuvring multiple warheads, or MIRVs, to complicate U.S. defensive measures. The U.S. considered the idea, but never deployed a FOBS capability, and has always favored traditional ICBMs that fly over the Arctic.</p>

But FOBS might be back. The Russians have [suggested](#) a FOBS capability for the SS-28 Sarmat heavy ICBM that will replace the SS-18 Satan, and now it looks like China may be pursuing a FOBS too, though one that replaces traditional MIRVs with hypersonic glide vehicles. It's the FOBS–HGV combination that's new and has led to a lot of guessing by China watchers and arms-control advocates about what the test entailed and what China's intent is in pursuing such a capability.

A FOBS capability, especially if combined with a highly manoeuvrable hypersonic glide vehicle, would enable the Chinese to circumvent existing and likely planned U.S. missile-defense and early warning systems. They would go through the back door, rather than try to bash down the defended and watched front door. Understanding the architecture of U.S. early warning and defense systems helps illuminate why China would test a FOBS–HGV capability now.

U.S. missile early warning starts with a [network](#) of infrared satellites that can detect a launch of an ICBM and track it through its flight. At the same time, upgraded early warning [radars](#) at Beale Air Force base in California, Fylingdales in the UK and Thule in Greenland, along with the Cobra Dane phased-array radar in Alaska and a range of other sensors, give radar tracks that cue missile interceptors for a mid-course intercept.

The U.S. national missile defense system currently [consists of](#) 40 ground-based interceptors at Fort Greely in Alaska and four at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, with 20 more to be deployed by 2023. The system is designed to defeat a limited raid from North Korean ICBMs, not a large-scale Chinese or Russian nuclear attack. However, Beijing is clearly anxious about U.S. defensive measures.

For China, the concern driving a FOBS–HGV capability must be that U.S. missile defense will expand and become more effective over time, particularly if an expanded ground-based interceptor force were to be [combined](#) with ship-based SM-3 interceptors.

China's nuclear arsenal is [small](#) in comparison with the U.S.'s, though the recent [discovery](#) of large fields of missile silos under construction in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia suggests that China is moving away from a 'minimum deterrent' posture and might be [debating caveats](#) on its no-first-use policy. Greater numbers of both silo-based and road-mobile ICBMs, if combined with a niche FOBS-HGV component that can strike the U.S. from the south, would certainly overwhelm any likely U.S. missile defense architecture. That would strengthen Chinese deterrence against U.S. non-nuclear strikes against China's nuclear forces, demonstrating that even an expanded U.S. capability to counter any residual Chinese nuclear retaliation wouldn't prevent a Chinese retaliation from inflicting massive damage. Of course, even a limited nuclear capability such as the one being developed by the North Korea changes decision-making, so the perceived need for Chinese nuclear expansion is less rational.

Despite hyperbolic headlines in the media, suggesting that this was a '[Sputnik moment](#)', a Chinese FOBS capability isn't a fundamental game-changer in nuclear stability. Yet it's not unimportant or irrelevant either. The U.S. will need to respond to this increased threat.

President Joe Biden and his administration would be very unwise to now adopt a [nuclear no-first-use posture](#), or a 'sole purpose' declaration as part of its nuclear posture review to be released in 2022. Such a stance would dramatically weaken extended nuclear deterrence, and if such a step were made against a backdrop of Chinese (and Russian) nuclear build-up and force posture changes, it would send the wrong signal to allies looking for U.S. leadership and resolve, especially after the debacle of the Afghanistan withdrawal.

Nor should the Biden administration cancel the ground-based strategic deterrent [program](#) that would replace ageing Minuteman ICBMs. Any [rush to scrap ICBMs](#) and turn the U.S. nuclear triad into a dyad would only make it easier for an adversary to deliver a decisive nuclear blow in a crisis, even if it couldn't deliver a knockout punch due to U.S. Navy ballistic missile submarines.

The U.S. should look at options for expanding its missile early warning and missile tracking coverage to deal with hypersonic glide vehicles and threats such as FOBS. Continued development of infrared

surveillance satellites will be important, including the ‘next-generation overhead persistent infrared’ (known as ‘[Next Gen OPIR](#)’) constellation that will eventually complement the current space-based infrared system. Ground-based sensors such as the upgraded early warning radar network could also be expanded to cover southern launch trajectories from China and Russia.

The FOBS–HGV test presents a challenge but also an opportunity for AUKUS. The [projected orbital path](#) from China to the U.S. passes very close to the west coast of Australia. One step that Canberra could take would be to offer to host a U.S. enhanced early warning radar in Western Australia as a joint facility to allow Australia to play an even greater role in supporting U.S. deterrence. Such a facility could complement the Jindalee over-the-horizon radar network and be a key sensor in the Defense Department’s integrated air and missile defense project (AIR 6500 Phase 2). But the challenge would be for Australia to act quickly to establish such a facility, rather than make it a decades-long process that renders such a move irrelevant.

In considering how to proceed with AIR 6500 Phase 2, it’s clear that having a resilient space-based sensor layer is vital to track fast-moving missile threats, especially those heading in Australia’s direction. Another good move that could be done via AUKUS. would be for Australia to work with the U.S. on Next Gen OPIR capabilities, including through sovereign satellite manufacture and launch to augment and reconstitute lost capability in a crisis. Such steps would be early and highly visible achievements for AUKUS., reinforcing the relevance of the new agreement, which is currently struggling with the question of how to facilitate Australia’s acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Public health groups: threats local officials
SOURCE	https://www.kake.com/story/45073108/public-health-groups-worry-threats-to-local-officials-could-escalate-as-us-plans-vaccine-rollout-for-kids
GIST	<p>Travis McAdam scours local newspapers and extremist social media content, along with receiving personal reports from community members about the threats.</p> <p>Some reports detail protests swarming outside of a public health officer's home. Others describe the hostile voicemail messages or emails sent to health officers.</p> <p>McAdam, an expert on extremism and white nationalism at the Montana Human Rights Network, has been monitoring threats of violence targeted toward public health officers in Montana, and sometimes northern Idaho.</p> <p>Throughout the pandemic, such threats have become a nationwide issue in the United States.</p> <p>Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has spoken openly about receiving death threats. Barbara Ferrer, Los Angeles County's public health director, also has opened up about receiving hate mail and threats dating back to March last year. In Washington state, Okanogan County community health director Lauri Jones has said that she installed a new security system and asked for police patrols around her home following repeated online threats.</p> <p>Researchers have also found that some of the threats targeting public health officers come from people with known ties to far-right extremist groups.</p> <p>Now, there's renewed worry that such harassment may increase nationwide with upcoming efforts to vaccinate young children against Covid-19.</p> <p>"There's the potential that that could end up being one of these flash points where threats and harassment spike again," McAdam told CNN. "Every time during the pandemic when there's a new development, it brings the potential for that harassment to increase."</p> <p>'I can only imagine this will increase'</p>

The [US Food and Drug Administration is now considering authorizing](#) the Pfizer/BioNTech coronavirus vaccine for children ages 5 to 11. With sign off by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, shots could be administered by next week.

Pending that authorization, public health officers plan to help get shots into those young arms -- but their efforts could come with more threats and harassment from the small minority of Americans who are anti-vaccine or Covid-19 skeptics.

"Unfortunately, I anticipate that this will be the case," Brooke Torton, a senior staff attorney at the [Network for Public Health Law](#), wrote in an email to CNN. "I can only imagine this will increase once younger children begin getting vaccinated."

Public health officials continue to face threats for simply administering the vaccine due to widespread misinformation, Torton noted, and the idea of vaccine requirements has the potential to cause outrage among some parents.

Certain managers of vaccination programs already have experienced intimidating posts online during the pandemic, Claire Hannan, executive director of the [Association of Immunization Managers](#), told CNN.

The association even discussed plans with some of its members to organize giving awards to doctors and community leaders for being "champions" of vaccines -- but some members voiced concern that such an award might invite threats and harassment against those being honored, Hannan said.

"Those who are speaking out against vaccines and doing that type of harassment are still in the very small minority, and I think it will stay that way," she said. "But anytime there's a new initiative, or in this case, a new vaccine coming for kids, then it's something that we'd have to consider that there's going to be that backlash from the anti-vaccine side."

'The very professionals that are trying to protect us, are unfairly being targeted'
Even though public health officers have feared for their safety throughout the pandemic, harassment seems to ramp up whenever new Covid-19 mitigation efforts or policies are introduced, Lori Tremmel Freeman, chief executive officer of the [National Association of County and City Health Officials](#), told CNN.

"At this point, things are so divisive politically that I think any new initiative associated with this disease - - any new effort to mitigate, whether it's vaccine or further masking in schools, et cetera -- is going to be hyper politicized," Freeman said.

"It just seems like the environment that we're in right now is ripe for people to really express their politics through ignoring health advice, which is just unfortunate," Freeman added. "The very professionals that are trying to protect us, are unfairly being targeted, and that is a threat really to all of us."

Last week, [NACCHO sent a letter](#) to US Attorney General Merrick Garland, requesting "you include the protection of public health department officials and staff in your directive to federal authorities to meet with local, state, Tribal, and territorial law enforcement to address the increased risk in harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence against school-related personnel," says the letter, signed by Freeman.

Freeman has not received a response yet from Garland's office -- but she said that she wrote the letter because, "we don't want to wait until a tragedy occurs to raise this to the highest levels that we can."

The letter noted that some health officials have had to start driving unmarked cars or installing at-home security cameras, others have had to rely on police escorts and round-the-clock security, while others worried their children would be targeted.

"These threats have taken a toll: at least 300 public health department leaders have left their posts since the pandemic began, impacting 20% of Americans. In many cases, they have been verbally abused and

physically threatened," according to the letter. "Of note, many of these threats have included misogynistic and racist undertones, further violating these officials."

Torton, the senior public health attorney, wrote in her email to CNN that the discussions she has had with public health officials nationwide "certainly reveal a pattern of abuse aimed at public health officials who are also women, and racial, sexual, and gender minorities," and "it seems they have been more likely to be targeted."

Torton was not involved in NACCHO's letter to the Attorney General.

The growing danger of vocal extremists

There is emerging evidence that members of extremist groups could be behind some of the harassment aimed at public health officers, according to the civil rights nonprofit group Southern Poverty Law Center.

"In [tracking political violence](#) in recent months and the anti-government militia movement for decades, we find this trend of increased threats and intimidation directed at local public health officials, as well as other local officials, very concerning," Rachel Carroll Rivas, senior research analyst at the Southern Poverty Law Center, wrote in an email to CNN.

"Our research indicated that some of the threats have come from individuals with known affiliation with far-right organizations that have been advocating and participating in violence."

McAdam in Montana told CNN that he has seen similar trends in his own research.

In Montana specifically, McAdam also has noticed that members of anti-government militia groups have started to partner with the people protesting and harassing public health officers.

For some extremist organizations, the same people angry about Covid-19 mitigation measures and threatening public health officers are ripe for recruitment, McAdam said.

"Remember the [anti-lockdown rallies](#) that were happening in state capitols or outside county courthouses or other public buildings? It wasn't necessarily that the anti-government crowds and the militia crowds were the ones organizing all of those -- but they were showing up in those spaces," McAdam said.

"For them, they were prime recruiting grounds, because you have generally conservative-leaning people who are really angry at the government right now," he said. "They started to tap into some of that anger."

Carroll Rivas noted in her email that attacks and harassment against local public health officers provide extremist organizations with an opportunity to "channel their anti-government talking points" into the mainstream.

"Covid-19 conspiracies and disinformation organizing includes a mix of extreme far-right actors and organizations, as well as mainstream politicians and everyday folks. The recruitment pool is unfortunately big," she wrote. "Focusing attacks at the local level is a bread-and-butter tactic of the anti-government militia movement and far-right."

Push to support public health

Passing and enforcing effective laws with stringent penalties for people who threaten and harass public health officials, launching public health educational campaigns and investing more in public health all could help curb the frequent harassment, Torton, the senior public health attorney, wrote in her email to CNN

"Public health needs its image bolstered," Torton said. "It's been damaged and politicized during this pandemic."

	<p>To combat the growing danger of extremist recruitment and threats to public health officers' safety, McAdam said that community members who support public health need to be more vocal in their backing of science and denounce the hate.</p> <p>"What's happening in many of these public meeting spaces is you have these extremists and bullies who are dominating those spaces where these topics are being discussed and decisions are being made," McAdam said.</p> <p>"Right now, it just feels kind of like there's a vacuum in some communities where it's really only those bullies who are being heard," he said. "The rest of us -- the majority of us that want to take the pandemic seriously and want to take these steps -- we need to make sure that our voices are being heard as well."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Public school workers vaccinated: near 90%
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3206746/nearly-90-of-washingtons-public-school-employees-vaccinated-against-covid/
GIST	<p>Nearly 90% of Washington's public K-12 school employees have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.</p> <p>"What we are seeing is stunning because in every single county in the state of Washington, our educators exceeded the overall vaccine population, the vaccinated population in that county, sometimes by twice as much," Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal said in a media briefing Oct. 28.</p> <p>He clarified that 90.4% of classroom employees, 87.6% of school building employees, and 86.9% of district employees are fully vaccinated.</p> <p>The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) reports that just 0.5% of school employees have initiated the vaccine process but are not considered fully vaccinated. Another 0.7% have obtained a medical exemption, and 9.6% have obtained a religious exemption.</p> <p>OSPI further reports that 0.3% of school employees did not obtain a vaccine or exemption. The figure accounts for retirees and separations unrelated to the vaccine requirement.</p> <p>"Our school employees are fully vaccinated at rates of 14–18 percentage points higher than the statewide average of vaccinated adults in Washington," Reykdal said. "This means our students are more likely to come into contact with an unvaccinated adult at the grocery store, a restaurant, or another community area than at their school."</p> <p>"Schools are, quite frankly, the safest place for kids to be," he added.</p> <p>Reykdal confirmed that the state is not considering vaccine mandates for students at this time. He did suggest that it will be considered as soon as the next school year if and once the U.S. Food and Drug Administration goes beyond emergency approval and fully authorizes COVID vaccines for children.</p> <p>"To the question of mandates for students, I do not think that would be appropriate," Reykdal added. "I suspect next school year, we could be talking about this, and I would certainly support that for next school year."</p> <p>Reykdal confirmed that Washington's public schools have experienced a 3.5% decline in student enrollment, something which he attributes to an increase in homeschooling. He clarified how that will affect the state's education budget, specifically within the context of what he described as a "labor shortage" within schools.</p>

	<p>“This is not a time to reduce more staff,” Reykdal said. “And that’s the effect if ... the legislature [says], ‘hey, we assumed you would have these resources, but we’re going to start pulling them back because your enrollments aren’t where we thought they’d be.’”</p> <p>“We are going to ask the governor and the legislature to keep us whole,” he said. “And while we still have three and a half percent [decline] of our student [population], you don’t get to reduce your budget that way.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Air Force first to face rejection of mandate
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2021/10/28/vaccine-mandate-air-force/
GIST	<p>Up to 12,000 Air Force personnel have rejected orders to get fully vaccinated against the coronavirus despite a Pentagon mandate, and officials say it is too late for them to do so by the Tuesday deadline, posing the first major test for military leaders whose August directive has been met with defiance among a segment of the force.</p> <p>The vast majority of active-duty airmen, more than 96 percent, are at least partially vaccinated, according to data from the Air Force. But officials have warned that, barring an approved medical or religious exemption, those who defy lawful orders to be fully immunized are subject to punishment, including possible dismissal from the service, or they could be charged in the military justice system.</p> <p>The challenge now confronting Air Force leaders — how to address potential large-scale dissent in the face of a top health priority that has been deeply politicized — is a bellwether for the dilemma in store across the military’s other services, which have staggered compliance deadlines ranging from the end of November to the middle of next summer and, in some cases, have experienced far greater resistance to President Biden’s mandate.</p> <p>A wave of dismissals could jolt the Air Force personnel system and cause significant challenges within units that must be ready to respond to crises at a moment’s notice, especially if some vital jobs — like pilots or aircraft maintainers — are overrepresented among those who could face expulsion, said Katherine L. Kuzminski, a military policy expert at the Washington think tank Center for a New American Security.</p> <p>“The fact that it’s a choice leading to potential loss to readiness is striking,” she said.</p> <p>The Air Force is the third-largest military service, just behind the Navy, with 324,000 active-duty airmen, making even 3 percent of its ranks a substantial number. For comparison, personnel assigned to Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, one of the service’s most-populated installations in the United States, numbered slightly more than 10,000 in 2019.</p> <p>The Air Force declined to say how many airmen appear to be outright refusing vaccination versus how many are seeking exemptions or have opted out because they are nearing their scheduled exit from the military. The Air Force will release some of those details after next week’s deadline passes, said Ann Stefanek, a spokesperson for the service.</p> <p>Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said this week that, generally, the number of religious exemptions for any vaccine is “very, very small.” The Army, which is the largest military service, has granted just one permanent medical exemption and no religious exemptions for the coronavirus vaccine, officials said. The Navy hasn’t granted any religious exemptions for any vaccine — for the coronavirus or otherwise — in the past seven years.</p> <p>The religious objections have centered on the fetal cell lines used in some aspects of vaccine development, essentially reproductions of cells from abortions performed in the 1970s and 1980s. The shots themselves don’t contain the actual cells. A regimen of numerous vaccines is required upon joining the military and even more if troops are deployed overseas. Some of the required vaccines, including those against Rubella, chickenpox and hepatitis A, also were developed using similar cells.</p>

Vaccination rates in the Air Force have slowed in recent weeks, and it is too late to begin a regimen now and be in by compliance by the Tuesday deadline, indicating the Air Force has mostly immunized all troops who want the vaccine, officials said.

Airmen receive counseling from leaders and medical providers when filing a medical exemption. For a religious exemption request, service members must meet with a chaplain to determine if their request was generated by a “sincerely held belief,” Stefanek said.

Information about their request is forwarded to a senior commander for consideration, Stefanek said, typically a three-star or four-star general who must weigh an individual’s request against a unit’s mission requirements.

Even if the commander believes an airman has made a sincere request, it may be denied if it is believed the unvaccinated airman could harm unit cohesion or make it too difficult to work close together, Stefanek said.

Historically, most administrative exceptions have been made for service members close to a planned departure, she said. Airmen who secured approved retirement or separation by Nov. 1, with an exit by April 1, are not subject to the vaccine mandate, she said.

Overall, the military vaccination rate has climbed since August, when Defense Department leaders informed the nation’s 2.1 million troops that immunization would become mandatory.

Nearly 87 percent of active duty troops are fully vaccinated, Kirby said, though hesitancy among military reservists and National Guard members drives down the rate for the entire military to about 68 percent. The numbers vary widely between service branches, fueled in part by the differing deadlines and cultural reasons, The Washington Post has found.

As vaccination rates rose, so did military deaths attributed to the more-infectious delta variant, with 71 coronavirus-related fatalities in the ranks to date. In September, more military personnel died from coronavirus infections than in all of 2020. None who died had been fully vaccinated, said Pentagon spokesman Maj. Charlie Dietz.

Service members who refuse to get vaccinated face an array of potential discipline. The Air Force has said airmen who refuse can change their mind after speaking with their commanders or if their exemption request is denied, though further noncompliance will be met with an escalating set of punishments, including involuntary separation or possible referring of court-martial charges.

Similar violations could be handled differently in the other services, an approach that Rachel E. Van Landingham, a former Air Force lawyer and president of the nonprofit National Institute of Military Justice, called unfair.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin can and should impose a standard of accountability, removing commanders from the process and limiting punishment to administrative discharges, rather than sending decisions to military courts, she said. Austin will likely not do that, she said, because the services “are parochial and don’t want to give up power.”

Nearly 40 recruits in the Air Force training pipeline were recently forced out for refusing to get vaccinated, officials said. They were sent home using a discharge method to easily banish recruits who fail to meet standards before officially entering the military.

Airmen who decide to leave the military over the coronavirus vaccine mandate may face similar problems if they want to transition to federal government employment or jobs with government contractors, which are popular draws for veterans but now mandate the immunization as well.

HEADLINE	10/28 New \$144M humanitarian aid to Afghanistan
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/10/28/us-provide-nearly-144-million-more-humanitarian-assistance-afghanistan/
GIST	<p>The United States will provide nearly \$144 million in new aid to those affected by the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, the White House announced Thursday.</p> <p>The additional funds will bring the total U.S. aid in the country and for Afghan refugees in that region to nearly \$474 million this year, “the largest amount of assistance from any nation,” National Security Council spokeswoman Emily Horne said in a statement.</p> <p>The aid will come as more than half of Afghanistan’s 40 million people are projected to face an “acute” food crisis this winter, according to a recent report from the U.N. World Food Program and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization. The organizations warned that many Afghans were facing levels of food insecurity just shy of “famine” conditions and that the situation was likely to worsen.</p> <p>“Reduced incomes, lower international and domestic remittances and continuing obstacles to humanitarian assistance (many related to the financial crisis and limited physical access during the winter period) are expected to contribute to the deterioration of food security,” the report stated.</p> <p>As The Washington Post’s Maite Fernández Simon reported, those problems began before the Taliban took over the country in August, with ongoing conflict displacing some 665,000 people and a prolonged drought that has hurt farmers.</p> <p>The collapse of Afghanistan’s public services and economy intensified after the country fell to the Taliban, when hundreds of thousands of Afghans and other residents tried to flee. The last U.S. troops departed Afghanistan on Aug. 30, ending the nearly 20-year war there that was launched as a response to the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.</p> <p>Horne noted that U.S. aid would “flow through independent humanitarian organizations who provide support directly to more than 18.4 million vulnerable Afghans in the region, including Afghan refugees in neighboring countries.”</p> <p>Some of the services those organizations provide include shelter, health care, winterization assistance, emergency food aid, water, sanitation and hygiene, her statement added.</p> <p>“To be clear, this humanitarian assistance will benefit the people of Afghanistan and not the Taliban, whom we will continue to hold accountable for the commitments they have made,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement Thursday.</p> <p>Last month, a U.N. donor conference for Afghanistan raised more than \$1 billion in humanitarian aid for the country, also to be distributed through the United Nations and other nongovernmental partner organizations. The United States at the time pledged \$64 million, bringing its total for the fiscal year to \$330 million.</p> <p>U.N. officials at the conference urged the international community to grant the people of Afghanistan a “lifeline” in “their most perilous hour.”</p> <p>“The international community must find ways to make cash available to allow the Afghan economy to breathe,” U.N. Secretary General António Guterres said then. “A total collapse would have devastating consequences to the people and risk to destabilize the neighboring countries with a massive outflow [of people].”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Gov. defends Climate Commitment Act veto
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SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/state/washington/article255332316.html
GIST	<p>Washington state Tribal leaders praised some of Gov. Jay Inslee's actions at the annual Centennial Accord Meeting Wednesday, Oct. 27, but also criticized his decision to veto sections of the Climate Commitment Act supported by Tribes.</p> <p>The annual meeting focuses on cementing the government-to-government relationship between the state and Tribes with representatives from the state's 29 federally recognized Tribes and a few other Pacific Northwest Tribes.</p> <p>Inslee was praised for climate action, the appointment of Tribal members to leadership positions and willingness to meet with Tribal Nations at the 32nd annual meeting held at the Skookum Creek Event Center in Shelton, Wash.</p> <p>"I know the veto of the consultation provisions has caused a lot of angst in the community, and I understand that, but I'm committed to having a very successful consultation process developed and I'm very pleased about how our discussions are going in that direction," Inslee said.</p> <p>"We don't agree on everything — the state and Tribes. And Tribe to Tribe, we don't agree on everything. However, I am grateful for you all coming to engage today," host-Tribe Squaxin Island Chairman Kris Peters said during opening remarks.</p> <p>The governor thanked the Tribes on behalf of all Washingtonians for their leadership during the pandemic.</p> <p>"One of the things I say repeatedly is the success of the Tribal communities is the success of the broader non-Tribal communities," Inslee said.</p> <p>Jumping off of pre-meeting sessions from the day before, Tribal leaders address the governor about the issues facing their individual nations.</p> <p>TREATY RIGHTS AND SALMON</p> <p>Carol Evans, chairwoman for the Spokane Tribe of Indians, spoke up about the previous day's natural resources meetings to say much of the conversation was focused on treaty rights.</p> <p>"The Spokane Tribe is not a treaty Tribe, we are an executive order Tribe... even though we don't have that treaty, there still is a trust responsibility to our people," she said. "We too are Indigenous people. We want to be part of the solutions — the solutions to climate change, to bringing back the salmon, to creating a healthy environment for everything that the creator has given to us to take care of. We need to be included."</p> <p>Lisa Wilson, a Tribal council member for Lummi Nation, discussed education, Tribal economy, broadband and reception on the reservations, the drug and opioid epidemic, renewable energy, water adjudication and a recent die-off of 2,500 Chinook salmon in the South Fork of the Nooksack River.</p> <p>"Climate change is the straw that broke the salmon's back," she said.</p> <p>Snoqualmie Tribal Chairman Robert de los Angeles said he was duty-bound to share the uncomfortable truth about what he described as the illegal occupation and continued desecration of the Tribe's most sacred site.</p> <p>Located about 30 miles east of Seattle, Snoqualmie Falls is one of the state's most popular scenic attractions and sees more than 1.5 million visitors a year. Though the Tribe purchased parcels of land surrounding the falls in 2019, they do not own the falls itself, which is currently part of two hydroelectric generating plants owned by Puget Sound Energy.</p> <p>"We cannot be complacent and congratulate each other when our own ancestors cannot rest in peace to know that each generation is losing the opportunity to share in the ancient traditions of the land," he said.</p>

The chairman said Tribal sovereignty was not considered in the decision-making over the falls and the Tribe did not feel supported by the governor's office.

CLIMATE COMMITMENT ACT

In a speech later echoed by leaders in the meeting, de los Angeles criticized Inslee's decision to veto sections of the Climate Commitment Act that Tribes worked on to guarantee historic levels of consultation and protections for their sacred sites and burial grounds.

"The Snoqualmie Tribe does not put in further trust in Jay Inslee. He has broken his word repeatedly," de los Angeles said, calling for Tribes to not comply by giving up Tribal sovereignty.

"The Snoqualmie Tribe will not surrender."

The Snoqualmie Tribe, National Congress of American Indians and other allies condemned the decision publicly in May. "Jay Inslee committed the most egregious and shameless betrayal of a deal I have ever witnessed from a politician of any party, at any level," said Fawn Sharp, president of the National Congress of American Indians and vice president of the Quinault Indian Nation, in a press release following the decision earlier this year.

Sharp reiterated her May statement during her address to the governor at the meeting, calling for support of "free, prior, and informed consent" — a standard set by the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The practice — which was adopted by the state Attorney General in 2019 — goes further than Tribal consultation by giving Tribal governments authority to put a full and complete stop to projects and programs that directly and tangibly affect Tribes, Tribal rights, lands and sacred sites.

Sharp also pointed to the 1999 agreement signed by then-Gov. Gary Locke and Attorney General Christine Gregoire to institutionalize government-to-government relationships with Tribes and the state in preparation for the new millennium. "The first thing was: We need to understand the unique political and sovereign standing of Tribal nations. And I think that's where we've seen a divergence," Sharp said.

MEMORIES OF FISHING WARS

Sharp said the recent collective memories of the violence against Native peoples during the fishing wars was part of the reason she felt so strongly about the veto, but qualified her criticism by crediting the governor's appointment of Justice Raquel Montoya-Lewis — the first Native American justice on the state's Supreme Court — who vacated a 1916 ruling that brought criminal charges on a Yakama Tribal member for fishing on traditional Tribal grounds.

Inslee defended his veto, saying that passage of the Climate Commitment Act and Clean Fuel Standard in the last legislative session was the greatest victory against climate change in the history of the United States.

He said his vetoes of two key parts of the bill — the Tribal consultation and a 5-cent gas tax that he called "the poison pill" put in the bill by legislators — earned him a "lot of grief." But contrary to criticism, he said, the ambitious action was the "most respectful of Tribes," citing that the Climate Commitment Act puts aside 10% of the funds for Tribal communities.

"I want to remind you that \$500 million would not exist except for my veto," he said. "I hope that next session in the legislature you will help us pass even more meaningful climate legislation."

Sharp and Inslee are both expected to attend the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, Oct. 31 through Nov. 12.

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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/why-getting-long-term-care-insurance-in-washington-is-near-impossible-and-has-been-for-months/
GIST	<p>George had been thinking about buying long-term care insurance for a while.</p> <p>George, who is 50 and declined to give his last name, said he is getting to the age where his parents and his friends' parents have started needing help with daily activities like bathing and eating. His mother in-law had insurance which helped cover the assistance she needed due to Parkinson's disease.</p> <p>"[Long-term care insurance] is something my wife and I are starting to talk about because we don't want to be a burden on our kids," he said.</p> <p>But there was another reason he was looking for coverage.</p> <p>Starting in January, most workers in Washington will see a 0.58% payroll deduction on their paychecks that will go toward funding the WA Cares Fund, the state's first-in-nation public insurance program which intends to help older residents age in their own homes without having to spend down their savings.</p> <p>However, workers can get out of the tax and apply for an exemption if they are 18 years or older and have purchased qualifying long-term care insurance before Nov. 1. Workers can apply for an exemption through next year. Once they opt out they are permanently excluded from coverage and benefits from the WA Cares Fund.</p> <p>In September, George looked up the list of companies that are authorized to sell long-term care policies in Washington and called a dozen of them. He talked to three insurance brokers and heard the same thing: no long-term insurance company was selling policies in Washington until after the Nov. 1 deadline.</p> <p>The freeze has been in place for a few months now, said David Clemons, a Kirkland long-term care insurance specialist and broker. Since Washingtonians found out about the WA Cares Fund and its payroll tax, long-term care insurance companies have seen an extraordinary spike in demand.</p> <p>"I was selling 20 to 30 applications a week and that's just unprecedented for me," Clemons said. "It's just huge. I did one year's worth of production in three months."</p> <p>Then in August, companies caught on and said they simply could not process the sheer volume of applications, especially for policyholders, who would likely cancel as soon as they were exempt from the WA Cares payroll tax, Clemons said.</p> <p>Companies also told brokers like Clemons that if a client canceled their policy within a year, they would charge back the commission they earned on the whole year, regardless of how long the person held the policy.</p> <p>People as young as 18 years old were seeking insurance for elder care they wouldn't need for at least four decades, purely to get out of the tax, he said.</p> <p>These days, Clemons guesses he receives about 40 to 50 emails a day, all from people desperately trying to buy insurance to avoid the tax. He tells them all the same thing: There will be no options for long-term care policies in Washington until after Nov. 1.</p> <p>Even if companies were selling, the process of applying for long-term care insurance and having a policy in place can take around 90 days, he said. Agencies often require a lengthy application, medical records and in some cases, a phone or face-to-face interview.</p>

One company saw 66,000 applications over the summer, an eightfold increase to the typical 8,000 they process in a year, according to Steve Valandra, spokesperson for Washington's Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

"It's been like a tsunami of inquiries and complaints from customers about WA Cares, even though it's not a program that we manage," said Valandra.

His agency has received around 1,200 phone calls and 2,000 live chats each month for the last three months. Typically, when insurance is not such a hot topic, the agency sees a fourth of that volume. The webpage with information on long-term care insurance has seen around 10,000 views a day, he said.

Long-term care insurance was affordable and underpriced when it was sold in the 1980s, Valandra said. But since then, health care costs have increased and many of those companies have gone bankrupt. There used to be more than 100 companies selling long-term care. Now, there are fewer than 20, he said.

"It's no secret that long-term care insurance in this country is a mess," Valandra said.

People often seek long-term care insurance when they are between 45 and 65 years old, but not everyone can afford it or get approved, Clemons said.

According to the American Association of Long-Term Care Insurance, a healthy and single 55-year-old in 2019 could expect to pay between \$2,000 and \$2,700 in annual premiums for long-term care insurance.

Clemons estimated that of the less than 20% of the population that seeks long-term care insurance, nearly 40% of applicants get rejected due to preexisting health conditions. Most people rely on savings or unpaid family members for assistance in old age.

"When people run out of money and they don't have anybody to take care of them for free, they go on Medicaid and the state is paying the bill," he said.

At the same time, private companies are struggling between low interest rates and a large share of policy holders claiming benefits, with around 70 to 80% of people ages 65 and older needing some form of long-term care assistance before they die.

Currently, people who move out of Washington for retirement will not be able to claim benefits, despite paying into the WA Cares Fund. The same is true for people who work in Washington but live in neighboring states. People who intend to retire and stop working in less than 10 years will lose eligibility within a few years, despite paying into the fund.

While policymakers have said they are considering changes to the plan, the assurances seem to not be much relief for Washingtonians. At least 150,000 people have applied for exemptions, according to WA Cares Fund Director Ben Veghte.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Jobless claims rise in Washington
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/unemployment-claims-up-in-washington-as-state-continues-its-slow-uneven-recovery/
GIST	<p>New unemployment claims in Washington kicked up last week, underscoring an economic recovery that continues to be frustratingly slow and starkly uneven.</p> <p>Washingtonians filed 5,545 new, or "initial," claims for jobless benefits last week, up nearly 16% from the prior week, according to data posted Thursday by the state Employment Security Department.</p>

That increase contrasted with the U.S. as a whole, [which saw claims fall 3.4% to 281,000, the fewest since the pandemic started last year](#), the Labor Department [reported](#) Thursday.

The good news: New jobless claims in Washington aren't out of line with historical patterns, which tend to reflect higher seasonal layoffs this time of year. Last week's claims were still well below the number filed in [the same week in pre-pandemic 2019](#).

Workers in Washington are also benefiting as employers seek to entice them with higher wages and other inducements. This week, two Seattle-area employers — Costco and [Starbucks](#) — announced plans to raise their minimum wages nationally, to \$17 and \$15, respectively.

But despite wage increases, [job growth in September was much slower than in June or July](#).

Further, while hiring has surged in some areas and industries in Washington, it lags in many others, new state data shows.

Washington's manufacturing industry, for example, was still down by 32,200 jobs, or nearly 11%, in September compared with September 2019.

Employment among clothing retailers in September was still down by nearly 20% compared with September 2019; restaurants and bars were still down by 8.7%.

By contrast, Washington's state's tech sector saw only relatively small job losses in 2020 and is well ahead of its pre-pandemic size.

Employment in two key tech subsectors, software publishing and computer system design, was up by nearly 8%, to 140,800, in September, compared with September 2019.

Overall, Washington's unemployment rate was 4.1% for September, or nearly back to its September 2019 level of 4.0%.

But that may partly reflect the fact that the percentage of working-age Washingtonians who are working or actively seeking jobs — the so-called labor force participation rate — has also fallen, from 65.1% in September 2019 to 64.1% this past September, according to [new data](#) from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The state's jobs recovery has also been uneven geographically. Some regions in Washington have rebounded more quickly than others.

In Pierce County, unemployment in September was 4.2%, compared with 4.4% in September 2019. The Bellingham area had a 4% unemployment rate in September versus 5.1% in 2019. The Bremerton area — 3.4% in September versus 4% in September 2019.

By contrast, the Seattle metropolitan area posted a 4.4% unemployment rate in September versus 2.9% in September. Snohomish County was 5.1% in September compared with 2.7% in September 2019.

The total number of Washingtonians filing weekly unemployment claims continues to fall: the state received 43,182 continued claims last week, down 6.3% from the week before, according to data provided by ESD.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Study: vaccinated transmission risk
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/28/covid-vaccinated-likely-unjabbed-infect-cohabiters-study-suggests

People who are fully vaccinated against Covid yet catch the virus are just as infectious to others in their household as infected unvaccinated people, research suggests.

Households are [a key setting for the transmission of Covid infections](#) (pdf), with frequent prolonged daily contact with an infected person linked to an increased risk of catching the virus.

However, questions have remained – including the true proportion of household contacts who become infected from an initial case, the duration of their infection, and the impact of vaccination on the risk of transmitting the virus and the chance of catching it.

Now a study has revealed that while vaccination against Covid is crucial to preventing severe disease and death, even fully jabbed individuals catch the virus – and pass it on.

[Writing in the Lancet](#), researchers from a number of institutions including Imperial College London and the UK Health Security Agency (HSA) report how they analysed data from 204 household contacts of 138 people infected with the Delta variant.

Of these contacts, who were recruited within five days of their household member showing symptoms and were tested daily for 14 days, 53 went on to become infected, 31 of whom were fully vaccinated and 15 were unvaccinated.

The results suggest even those who are fully vaccinated have a sizeable risk of becoming infected, with analysis revealing a fully vaccinated contact has a 25% chance of catching the virus from an infected household member while an unvaccinated contact has a 38% chance of becoming infected.

However, the figures do not shed light on the severity of illness, while the team cautions these figures fall within a range of possible values, meaning the exact size of the difference is unclear.

The analysis further suggests that whether an infected individual is themselves fully vaccinated or unvaccinated makes little or no difference to how infectious they are to their household contacts.

The team add that the peak level of virus in infected individuals was the same regardless of whether they were jabbed or not, although these levels dropped off more quickly in the vaccinated people, suggesting they cleared the infection sooner.

“This likely explains why [fully vaccinated] breakthrough cases are as infectious to their contacts as [unvaccinated] cases” said Prof Ajit Lalvani, chair of infectious diseases at Imperial College London and an author of the study.

The team also looked more closely at those who were fully vaccinated.

“What we found, surprisingly, was that already by three months after receipt of the second vaccine dose, the risk of acquiring infection was higher compared to being more recently vaccinated,” said Lalvani.

“This suggests that vaccine-induced protection is already waning by about three months post-secondary,” he added.

Lalvani stressed that vaccination, including boosters, was important, noting that unvaccinated people cannot rely on the immunity of those who are fully jabbed for protection.

Should fully vaccinated individuals become infected, he added, they remain protected against severe disease and death, and tend to have only a mild infection.

However, when asked if the data suggested [booster doses should be offered](#) sooner than six months after a second jab, Lalvani said the emphasis should be on encouraging those already eligible to take the extra dose.

	<p>Prof Rowland Kao, an epidemiologist at the University of Edinburgh, who was not involved in the work, said the estimates of high rates of transmission among household contacts underscored the need to vaccinate teenagers and give boosters to vulnerable people.</p> <p>“The vaccinations of younger persons to slow down transmission in the community, and the boosters to directly protect against severe infection and hospitalisation,” he said.</p> <p>Kao suggested the findings also added weight to calls for the introduction of further measures in the UK to tackle the spread of Covid, adding the move could also mitigate the risks posed by other respiratory infections including flu.</p> <p>“The result that vaccinated individuals who become infected appear to pose a similar infection risk to others also emphasises the need for continued or improved non-pharmaceutical interventions to further slow down transmission rates and ease hospital burdens over the winter,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Cop26 activists head to Glasgow
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/28/cop26-activists-head-to-glasgow-via-land-sea-and-in-a-giant-metal-ball
GIST	<p>Arnd Drossel has spent the past three months rolling around inside a 160kg steel ball.</p> <p>The German environmental activist left his home in Paderborn on 30 July in the giant contraption resembling a hamster ball that he made with his son.</p> <p>Now he is finally approaching Glasgow in time for the UN’s Cop26 climate summit with a collection of environmental promises he has collected from passersby en route.</p> <p>“I wanted to show that we are all connected around the world by the promises we make to the environment,” he said as he waited for a ferry in Belfast.</p> <p>“When I am walking on a flat surface it feels like walking up a mountain, because of the weight of the ball,” Drossel said. “When I go uphill, I sometimes have to ask people to help me push the ball up, but this also symbolises people growing and working together.”</p> <p>Drossel is one of many activists who have decided to travel to the summit in a sustainable fashion while raising awareness of the climate emergency. Although walking and cycling are the most popular options, Glasgow can also expect to welcome travellers who have elected other alternatives.</p> <p>“I don’t know what I’ll do once I reach Glasgow. I don’t have a pass for the summit, I don’t even have accommodation booked. I’ve been improvising all along,” said Agis Emmanouil, a Greek ultra-marathon runner who set off from Athens in August. Along the way he has been visiting schools and talking to pupils about the climate emergency.</p> <p>“The journey changed me,” Emmanouil said. “Yesterday in Manchester teen boys on the street asked me what I was doing. I invited them to run with me for a bit, we spoke about the climate. I would not have done that before.”</p> <p>Another activist, Dave Erasmus, who along with five colleagues is sailing to Glasgow from Bristol, recording sound samples of whales and other sea creatures along the way, said: “We didn’t want to just do rebellious activism. We didn’t want to just be pleading.</p> <p>“We wanted to actually do something that was transformational for ourselves.”</p>

	<p>Neither Erasmus nor the rest of the crew had much sailing experience before setting off. “None of us had actually gone with the wind before but it’s all part of the change that we need to make,” he said. “We need to be making a move back to a world where we’re powered completely in unison with what the biosphere provides us.”</p> <p>Once they reach the summit Erasmus plans to play the sound samples in the corridors of the conference centre. “We’re trying to bring the actual voice of nature to the summit,” he said. “Because if you don’t listen to something, you can’t connect with it.”</p> <p>He hopes this will persuade conference officials to dedicate more time to discussing the ocean. “The ocean is the final frontier on our planet and we don’t know much about it,” Erasmus said. “It’s our biggest friend in fighting climate change, but it’s not even on the main agenda at the Cop.”</p> <p>For many who are travelling to Cop26 while leaving a minimal carbon footprint, the journey matters more than the destination.</p> <p>“My main aim is to inspire people,” said Drossel, who hopes that he will be able to present the promises he collected to the officials at the summit. “I want to show that a lot of small changes brought together can cause a wave.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Climate talks threatened by clash over coal
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/g-20-climate-talks-threatened-by-clash-over-coal-ahead-of-cop26-11635491696?mod=hp_lead_pos4
GIST	<p>ROME—Leaders from the Group of 20 major economies are split over phasing out coal and limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, officials said, throwing into doubt whether ambitious climate change targets can be hit.</p> <p>The gathering of world leaders in Rome this weekend is expected to set the tone for talks at the nearly two-week-long United Nations climate summit in Glasgow, slated to follow immediately afterward.</p> <p>G-20 nations, including the U.S., China, Russia, India and Saudi Arabia, will attempt to forge a common position on how best to adhere to the 2015 Paris climate agreement, which asks countries to start reducing their emissions as soon as possible and achieve a climate-neutral world by midcentury.</p> <p>Officials said forging consensus on policies to achieve this remains difficult given the G-20’s competing interests and that few concrete proposals are likely to come out of the summit.</p> <p>Without a positive signal from G-20 leaders, agreement at COP26—as the Glasgow climate summit is known—will be even harder to achieve, climate activists fear.</p> <p>The G-20 and COP26 could be “mutually reinforcing or mutually weakening,” said one senior official involved in the talks.</p> <p>Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi told Italy’s Parliament earlier this month that his country, which holds the G-20 presidency this year, hoped to achieve consensus among the group’s leaders before the Glasgow conference.</p> <p>“The climate crisis can only be managed if all major global players decide to act in an incisive, coordinated and simultaneous manner.” Mr. Draghi said, noting that G-20 members account for about three-quarters of the world’s carbon emissions.</p> <p>The issue of coal will be a litmus test of G-20 leaders’ political resolve. The group includes several heavy users and producers of the fossil fuel, including China, the U.S. and Australia. In July, G-20 environment</p>

ministers meeting in Naples couldn't agree to set dates for phasing out the use of coal and ending the building of new coal-fired power stations.

Coal-rich countries such as China, India and Australia emerged as [vocal opponents](#) of such targets, said two people familiar with the negotiations, adding that Turkey, Russia and Saudi Arabia were also part of the camp.

Some countries fear that an agreement to [phase out coal](#) would quickly lead to pressure to wind down the use of other fossil fuels such as gas or oil, said Chris Littlecott, an associate director at the climate consulting firm E3G.

Neither China nor India are willing to commit to an end date or use the phrase 'phase out' in relation to coal.

A [surge in fossil fuel prices](#) as economies reopened after lockdowns has seen several countries, including China and the U.K., lean on coal to power their industries and electricity supply.

G-20 climate officials are meeting face-to-face late this week, immediately before their leaders come together at the weekend, to discuss these issues as well as trying to fix a deadline for ending fossil-fuel subsidies.

China's President Xi Jinping said in April that China would begin "phasing down" its coal consumption in 2026. But neither China nor India, the second-most populous country in the world, are willing to commit to an end date or use the phrase "phase out" in relation to coal.

Coal powers around 56% of China's industry-heavy economy and is regarded as vital for the country's energy security. It is unlikely China will even start considering this politically sensitive question until after the twice-a-decade Communist Party congress in fall 2022, according to a person familiar with the discussion.

China [released its updated climate targets](#) on Thursday, reiterating numbers said last year by Mr. Xi. China stuck to a pledge to start reducing its carbon emissions "before 2030," despite international pressure to begin earlier, and said it would achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

China has signaled it is potentially more open to committing to ending overseas financing for coal use. "If they were to move on one issue, that would be the most likely," said Mr. Littlecott.

Mr. Xi said China would stop building [overseas coal projects](#) at the U.N. General Assembly in September. China had been the main holdout during the G-20 talks on the issue this summer, people said.

Advanced economies and climate scientists have been pressing for agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared with preindustrial global temperature levels to [avert what they fear will be an environmental disaster](#).

Developing countries such as China and India have said that it is more important to focus on implementing existing pledges first and providing financial support for poorer countries in their fight against climate change.

The 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change aimed to limit global warming to "limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius" compared with preindustrial levels.

China and India have repeatedly criticized developed countries for falling short of their promises to cut emissions and provide funding for developing countries.

	<p>“China and India would be much more willing to commit to more ambition if the developed world could demonstrate it follows through on its pledges,” said a climate expert who has followed the negotiations closely.</p> <p>The G-20 summit will be the first in-person gathering of the leaders of the world’s richest nations since the Covid-19 pandemic started, including President Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But at least four G-20 leaders aren’t expected to travel to Rome, including Mr. Xi and President Vladimir Putin of Russia, a major gas and oil producer. Mr. Xi is expected to participate via a video link.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Global chip shortage ‘far from over’
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/global-chip-shortage-is-far-from-over-as-wait-times-get-longer-11635413402?mod=hp_lista_pos1
GIST	<p>Almost a year into a global chip shortage, the problems are increasing for many customers as delays get even longer and sales are lost.</p> <p>Manuel Schoenfeld placed an order in May for transmission chips for the utility-monitoring devices made by his New York-based company PowerX. He was told the chips would arrive by summer, then fall, then winter and now doesn’t expect to get them until May 2022.</p> <p>“This is far from over,” Mr. Schoenfeld said.</p> <p>The global semiconductor shortage is worsening, with wait times lengthening, buyers hoarding products and the potential end looking less likely to materialize by next year. Demand didn’t moderate as expected. Supply routes got clogged. Unpredictable production hiccups slammed factories already running at full capacity.</p> <p>What’s left is widespread confusion for manufacturers and buyers alike. Some buyers trying to place new orders are getting delivery dates in 2024, said Ian Walker, operations director at electronic-components distributor Princeps Electronics Ltd., which helps companies find chips.</p> <p>“It really feels as if we are running out,” Mr. Walker said.</p> <p>The \$464 billion semiconductor industry has been unable to keep pace, leading to lost revenue across the board. The pain is spreading beyond the initially affected—like car makers and home appliance manufacturers—to makers of other products, including medical equipment and smoking devices. The smartphone industry will grow by just 6% year-over-year, or half the initial forecast from earlier this year, because of chip woes, according to Counterpoint Research, which tracks handset shipments.</p> <p>Apple Inc. warned Thursday that supply-chain disruptions are hindering iPhone and other product manufacturing ahead of the holiday-shopping quarter, even as the company reported a record 12-month profit.</p> <p>Chip makers say the lack of supplies has caused them to lose sales. “Trust me, we would be shipping a lot more if we weren’t constrained by the supply chain of these other components in the industry,” Intel Corp. Chief Executive Pat Gelsinger said last week on an earnings call. Mr. Gelsinger has said he expects shortages to last until 2023.</p> <p>Wait times for chip deliveries have continued to climb above a healthy threshold of 9-12 weeks. Over the summer, the wait stretched to 19 weeks on average, according to Susquehanna Financial Group. But as of October, it has ballooned to 22 weeks. It is longer for the scarcest parts: 25 weeks for power-management components and 38 weeks for the microcontrollers that the auto industry needs, the firm said.</p> <p>Scott Wren, senior global equity strategist at Wells Fargo Investment Institute, said he would have thought six months ago that chip shortages would start easing by this time. But now he said they will likely last</p>

until 2023. Wells Fargo Investment Institute recently revised down its U.S. GDP forecast to 6.3% from 7% as the chip shortage limited the supply of consumer goods.

“This is playing out considerably longer than we initially thought,” Mr. Wren said.

A supply bounceback this year relied on rosy assumptions that already maxed-out production wouldn’t face further setbacks. But the chip-making process is under duress from beginning to end.

Basic [building-block materials](#) such as substrates are in short supply. Mishaps from [bad weather](#) and fires have [interrupted wafer production](#). The final stage of manufacturing has been undercut by virus outbreaks and [subsequent factory closures](#) in Malaysia, which specializes in product packaging.

Global shipping constraints have [added to disruptions and delays](#). Chip assembly can require that parts travel up to 25,000 miles before becoming finished products, according to a report by Accenture and the Global Semiconductor Alliance.

Sourcing chips has turned almost into a lottery, leading to over ordering that creates more supply strain, industry experts say.

“People are buying a lot of parts to have just in case, and that’s exacerbating the shortage,” said Willy Shih, a professor of management at Harvard Business School, who specializes in semiconductors and supply chains.

Stockpiling could also lead to an inflated sense of demand, analysts warned, which has raised concerns that an industrywide ramp-up in supply could lead to a chip glut. Major chip makers such as [Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co.](#), [Samsung Electronics Co.](#) and Intel have announced [ambitious investments](#) to increase production, but such facilities [cost billions of dollars](#) and take years to [become operational](#).

The auto industry, hit hard and early by the chip shortage, has been the most vocal in calling for increasing supply. The world’s largest contract chip maker, TSMC, has boosted auto-chip production by 60% this year, but car makers [have struggled to recover](#) as factory closures continue and estimated losses mount.

On Wednesday, [General Motors Co.](#) and [Ford Motor Co.](#) each [reported steep drops](#) in third-quarter profit as the computer-chip shortage dented factory output. Both companies said they see the semiconductor situation gradually easing next year.

“Nobody expected it to get as challenging as it is right now,” said Ambrose Conroy, founder of supply-chain consulting firm Seraph. “We’re not going to get ahead of this for quite a while.”

Even companies considered to have well-established supply chains, such as [Tesla Inc.](#) [have noted challenges](#) in meeting customer demand, as a lack of critical components has weighed down production and been a drag on revenue growth. Other businesses have also [begun to warn investors](#) of a prolonged impact.

The number of semiconductors in a modern car, from the ignition to the braking system, can exceed a thousand. As the global chip shortage drags on, car makers from General Motors to Tesla find themselves forced to adjust production and rethink the entire supply chain. Illustration/Video: Sharon Shi
Last week, [Philip Morris International Inc.](#) estimated that it missed out this quarter on hundreds of thousands of unit sales of its IQOS smoking devices, a heated tobacco stick marketed as an alternative to traditional or electronic cigarettes. That figure could reach 1.5 million in the second half of the year, executives said.

Chief Financial Officer Emmanuel Babeau said that while the situation could improve in the first half of 2022, it was also possible that problems could persist until 2023. “I have to admit that nothing is totally clear at that stage,” he said.

Royal Philips NV, which makes medical equipment, slashed its sales and profit growth outlook this year, as it suffered €150 million, the equivalent of \$174 million, in missed sales in the third quarter, said Chief Executive Frans van Houten during the most recent earnings call.

At PowerX, the utility-monitoring devices company, the lack of components has eaten into the company's profit margins and cost millions of dollars in unfulfilled device orders. The firm has paid up to five times usual prices to get smaller batches of supply. One manufacturer-promised shipment of 20,000 chips fell through, Mr. Schoenfeld said, because he was told the factory had burned down.

PowerX said it has nearly six months of inventory stockpiled versus six weeks or so what a startup firm like his would have handy.

"We are already concerned about what happens when our chips run out," he added.

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HEADLINE	10/28 More travelers heading to Europe 2022
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/more-travelers-are-heading-to-europe-in-2022-after-the-pandemic-sank-vacation-plans-11635393662?mod=hp_listc_pos1
GIST	<p>More travelers are starting to think big about vacations again.</p> <p>After a long stretch of mainly short-term travel planning, inquiries are picking up for trips well into 2022, according to data from hotels and travel-industry analysts. The booking rates are starting to trend closer to pre-pandemic levels, analysts say.</p> <p>Shawna Huffman Owen, president and chief executive officer of Huffman Travel in Chicago, has seen longer-term bookings increase in recent weeks. Even customers' tone of voice has changed from earlier in the pandemic, she says: "It was a sense of anxiety in people's voices, and I'm not hearing that."</p> <p>Many travelers are still trying to use up vacation days before the end of the year by booking domestic and international trips. But travel advisers say more travelers in recent weeks have been committing to trips over spring break and for next summer.</p> <p>Travelers are encouraged by the availability of Covid-19 booster shots and news on vaccines for children, says Nora Blum, vice president at Travel Leaders Market Square Travel in Maple Grove, Minn. Some also have travel credit cards as well as credits from canceled trips that need to be spent.</p> <p>For 2022, many are already setting their sights on Europe, where some governments are embracing long-term, low-intensity ways to manage Covid-19 as it becomes endemic in parts of the continent.</p> <p>A quarter of Best Western's North American hotels and one third of its hotels in Europe are outpacing 2019 bookings for the following summer, according to President and CEO David Kong. Many guests are still more comfortable booking closer to the time of travel, but the company says it expects these percentages to grow in the coming weeks and months, particularly for destinations like Europe, as borders open and travel restrictions lift.</p> <p>This longer-term planning points to travelers' rising confidence as hotel-booking lead times begin to approach 2019 levels, says Katie Moro, vice president of data partnerships for hospitality at Amadeus, a travel technology company. At the height of the pandemic, in the first quarter of 2021, 72% of U.S. bookings, including business and leisure, were made within seven days of travel. That figure is down to 55%, closer to the rate of 49% in 2019, Ms. Moro says.</p> <p>Marriott International Inc. has seen an uptick in room nights booked into summer 2022 for its U.S. and Canadian hotels in recent weeks, a spokeswoman says. As of October, InterContinental Hotels</p>

[Group](#) PLC has seen global guest bookings for summer 2022 hit almost the same rate as in October 2019 for the following summer, a spokeswoman says.

Because many travelers are rebooking canceled 2020 or 2021 trips using travel credits, Ms. Blum says availability for next year is going quickly for certain types of trips, like Alaskan and European river cruises.

Samantha Collum, director of operations and senior travel adviser at River Oaks Travel Concierge in Houston, says some of the most popular destinations for next year include Italy, Croatia, Greece and France.

“I think Europe is the place that people still feel very confident about just because it’s easy, it’s straightforward, it’s interesting but maybe not too exotic,” she says.

Airlines are preparing for the expected demand. [United Airlines Holdings Inc.](#) is [adding new trans-Atlantic flights](#) to Amman, Jordan; Bergen, Norway; Portugal’s Azores and Spain’s Mallorca and Canary Islands. United also plans to expand service next spring to large European cities, including Berlin and Rome, from some of the airline’s major U.S. hubs.

[Delta Air Lines](#) Inc. CEO Ed Bastian said in an earnings call earlier this month that he expects [European travel next spring and summer](#) to look similar to the busy summer airlines recently had for U.S. domestic travel.

Beyond Europe, travel advisers say people are eyeing the Caribbean and the Galápagos Islands. Many family travelers still feel most confident about domestic travel and are scheduling [Disney](#) trips and cruises out of Florida, Ms. Blum says.

Despite the recent increase in some long-term bookings, many travelers are sticking with short-term trips. Travelers are booking domestic flights an average of 31 days in advance, according to travel app Hopper. The booking window is similar to fall 2020 and about 10 days shorter than in fall 2019.

In the short term, holiday travel is a primary focus. As lodging availability has grown scarce in Mexico and the Caribbean for the period, travel advisers say U.S. clients are turning their attention to France, Germany and other regional countries in December.

Halie Woody, a copywriter, booked her first trip out of the country last week for a visit to Italy in June. The 27-year-old got a passport during the pandemic when she was tired of being at home in Ferndale, Mich. She took breaks by going on camping trips but says she has long wanted to go to Europe.

Because she has friends who have traveled to Italy, she figured it would be a fitting first destination. She’s looking forward to eating lots of carbs, drinking wine and sightseeing.

While Ms. Woody says she feels comfortable traveling abroad because she is fully vaccinated, she is bracing herself in case international travel regulations change again.

“We’ve seen over the past year or so it’s been pretty unpredictable,” she says.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Jobless claims fall to new pandemic low
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/weekly-jobless-claims-10-28-2021-11635365743?mod=hp_major_pos1#cxrecs_s
GIST	<p>Worker filings for unemployment benefits declined last week to their lowest level since the coronavirus pandemic began, as employers competed for employees in a tightening labor market.</p> <p>Initial unemployment benefits, a proxy for layoffs, decreased to 281,000 last week from a revised 291,000 a week earlier, the Labor Department said Thursday.</p>

“You’re seeing continued progress back towards the average before the pandemic,” Nela Richardson, an economist at the human-resources software firm Automatic Data Processing Inc., said before Thursday’s data. Hiring and demand both remain strong, making companies eager to hold on to the workers they have while trying to hire others.

“It has been a challenge for employers, especially in low-paid service jobs, to keep workers on staff,” Ms. Richardson said.

The four-week average for weekly claims fell to 299,250, holding well below a recent peak of 424,000 in mid-July but remaining above 2019’s weekly average of 218,000. It declined through much of the summer despite an increase in Covid-19 cases due to the Delta variant and the economic uncertainty that caused.

Layoffs are decreasing at the same time that record numbers of workers [are quitting their jobs](#), showing worker confidence in the labor market. Around 4.3 million workers left their jobs in August, the highest recorded monthly figure since 2000. Workers who leave their jobs voluntarily don’t qualify for unemployment benefits, and therefore don’t show up in claims figures.

Companies are paying more to attract and keep employees: Average hourly earnings for all private-sector workers in September rose 4.6% from a year earlier, the fastest rate of growth since February.

“We aren’t seeing that wave of job seekers coming back, and that’s because, first and foremost, we’re still in a pandemic,” said AnnElizabeth Konkel, an economist at the jobs website Indeed. “Employers are trying to figure out, ‘how do I get the workers I need?’ and using different tools to do that,” like offering starting bonuses, higher pay and more benefits, she said.

Companies are competing for a shrunken pool of workers, too. The labor-force participation rate—the share of adults holding or actively seeking jobs—was 63.4% in January 2020, before plummeting with the arrival of the pandemic, and has only recovered to 61.6%. Lingering pandemic effects like school and child-care disruptions, along with long-term shifts like accelerating retirements, have trimmed the number of available workers.

It is unclear how many of those workers will ever return to the labor force. New research from the St. Louis Fed found that more than three million Americans [retired early](#), out of the 5.25 million who left the labor force from the beginning of the pandemic.

Despite the expiration of temporary, federally enhanced pandemic-assistance programs, a handful of states continue to report additional claims for such benefits because of technical delays processing the applications. It reflects how overwhelmed the state unemployment-insurance systems were, Ms. Konkel said.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Governor: cases plateau ‘worrisome’
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3206874/gov-inslee-plateau-covid-cases-worrisome/
GIST	<p>Over the last couple of months, COVID cases and hospitalizations in Washington have declined. However, Gov. Jay Inslee said in a press conference Thursday, “they still remain very high.”</p> <p>“Unfortunately, the recent week or two, we’ve experienced a plateauing of the numbers rather than a decline,” Gov. Inslee said. “This is very worrisome.”</p> <p>On average, the governor says, there are still more than 2,000 cases reported each day statewide.</p> <p>“We know many are suffering due to this pandemic, including those who now are still in the waiting line to get elective surgery because our hospitals remain stressed, with high occupancy rate, as much as 90%,” he said. “Most systems are just now getting back to trying to do elective surgery.”</p>

If case counts and hospitalizations were to rise again, besides the inevitable death and disability of COVID-19, Inslee says, there will also be people who are unable to get surgeries and care they need.

“We still have an extremely dangerous pandemic on our hands,” he said.

As Inslee sees it, Washington has reached a fork in the road.

“Are we going to accept COVID, allow it to continue to run wild, or are we going to continue to fight it? That’s a definite decision for the state of Washington,” he said. “Every day, I believe we should fight it. We should not surrender to it. We should continue our efforts to utilize this life-saving vaccine. We know we have the tools to beat this virus, and we ought to use them.”

Gov. Inslee did say that the state has made real progress in vaccinations, and he could “not be more delighted in the progress we’ve made with public employees becoming vaccinated.”

Looking ahead, Inslee says he does not have a crystal ball and can’t predict the course of the virus.

“We are hopeful that more people will get vaccinated and we will not experience a sixth wave,” he said. “But today I’m very concerned about experiencing a sixth wave this winter as people are coming indoors, becoming more exposed to transmission as they come closer indoors.”

As to whether or not there could be a COVID vaccine mandate statewide — similar to what is now in effect in King County — the governor says that doesn’t make sense for the state at this time. There is, however, a statewide vaccine requirement for large events, which was announced a couple of weeks prior and will take effect in mid-November.

“We’ve not added [vaccine verification] to restaurant activities at that date because we don’t think, at the moment, that makes sense for the state of Washington,” Inslee said. “But we’re looking at the experience of King County to see if it’s positive, and we’ll continue to monitor that situation.”

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HEADLINE	10/28 Old power gear slowing use of clean energy
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/business/energy-environment/electric-grid-overload-solar-ev.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Business
GIST	<p>Seven months after workers finished installing solar panels atop the Garcia family home near Stanford University, the system is little more than a roof ornament. The problem: The local utility’s equipment is so overloaded that there is no place for the electricity produced by the panels to go.</p> <p>“We wasted 30,000-something dollars on a system we can’t use,” Theresa Garcia said. “It’s just been really frustrating.”</p> <p>President Biden is pushing lawmakers and regulators to wean the United States from fossil fuels and counter the effects of climate change. But his ambitious goals could be upended by aging transformers and dated electrical lines that have made it hard for homeowners, local governments and businesses to use solar panels, batteries, electric cars, heat pumps and other devices that can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.</p> <p>Much of the equipment on the electric grid was built decades ago and needs to be upgraded. It was designed for a world in which electricity flowed in one direction — from the grid to people. Now, homes and businesses are increasingly supplying energy to the grid from their rooftop solar panels.</p> <p>These problems have become more urgent because the fastest way to cut greenhouse gas emissions is to move machinery, cars and heating equipment that currently run on oil and natural gas to electricity generated by solar, wind, nuclear and other zero-emission energy sources. Yet the grid is far from having</p>

enough capacity to power all the things that can help address the effects of climate change, energy experts said.

“It’s a perfect violent storm as far as meeting the demand that we’re going to have,” said Michael Johnston, executive director of codes and standards for the National Electrical Contractors Association. “It’s no small problem.”

Electric grids are also under strain from [climate change](#) itself. California imposed [rolling blackouts last year](#) during a heat wave. In February, [more than 200 people](#) died after the Texas electric grid collapsed during a winter storm. Then in August, Hurricane Ida toppled electric lines across Louisiana, [leaving millions without power for days](#).

‘Infrastructure That Is Failing’

Ms. Garcia and her husband, Quin, bought their home in Portola Valley a little more than a year ago. They invested in solar because Ms. Garcia, a 37-year-old biotech lawyer, and her husband, a venture capitalist, wanted to do their part to fight climate change.

The Garcias are not pioneers. About one out of 10 utility customers in the state have solar power, according to the California Solar and Storage Association.

So, the Garcias were surprised when their utility, Pacific Gas & Electric, would not allow them to fully use the panels.

The problem is that on sunny days, rooftop solar panels can produce a lot more electricity than is being used in the neighborhoods where they are installed. That can overload electrical transformers, which help regulate and direct the flow of electricity within a neighborhood, forcing them to shut off or blow up. Such problems can be avoided by installing newer transformers that have greater capacity.

Barry Cinnamon, the chief executive of Cinnamon Energy Systems, the company that installed the panels on the Garcia home, said such problems were far too common. “My experience and understanding of the way utilities do things is they just wait until the neighborhood is overloaded and then the transformer blows up,” Mr. Cinnamon said.

PG&E apologized for the delay in upgrading the transformer outside the Garcia home, noting that it can take workers up to six months to do so if they are swamped with projects.

During a heat wave in August 2020, an aging transformer at an electrical substation in downtown San Jose, which is about 25 miles from where the Garcias live, blew up. That blacked out the homes of tens of thousands of people, some for days.

The city’s mayor, Sam Liccardo, expressed frustration with PG&E, saying the company’s dated equipment was hampering San Jose’s plan to increase the use of solar panels, electric cars and other new devices. To achieve its climate goals, the city has already banned the use of natural gas in new buildings, the largest local government in the country to do so.

“It’s an infrastructure that’s failing,” Mr. Liccardo, a Democrat, said. “We’re very ambitious. The question is whether there will be a grid ready when we get there.”

Mark Esguerra, senior director of electric asset strategy at PG&E, said the company planned to upgrade a lot more of its equipment. Since the failure in San Jose last year, the company has replaced 400 transformers in and around that city, of a total of 62,000 in Santa Clara County. The company added that it supports the use of solar panels by nearly 600,000 of its residential customers and electric cars owned by 360,000 customers.

“We know that our grid is going to look different in a few years,” Mr. Esguerra said.

How Much and How Fast?

The big challenge for policymakers and the utility industry is figuring out how quickly to invest in the grid while keeping the energy affordable.

It would cost hundreds of billions of dollars to upgrade the distribution networks across the country to meet the country's clean energy goals, said Ben Hertz-Shargel, global head of Grid Edge, a division of Wood Mackenzie, a research and consulting firm. That does not include spending on long-distance transmission lines and power generating equipment like solar and wind farms.

Mr. Hertz-Shargel has personal experience with the shortcomings of the electric grid. When he was recently charging his Tesla at his home on Long Island, the electrical equipment that connected the utility's power line to his home became so hot that it melted.

"I'm the only E.V. on my block and even that modest use was enough to overwhelm the secondary side of the grid on my house," he said. "It just shows how many weak links there are in the utility distribution system."

How much money utilities spend on their equipment is determined in a complicated process that involves state regulators who have to approve increases in electricity rates that pay for upgrades.

State officials don't want to raise rates too much because it hurts consumers and could undermine public support for clean energy, said Abigail Anthony, a utility regulator in Rhode Island who also chairs a committee that studies these issues at the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners.

"Not only do the cars and the heating systems need to be affordable," Ms. Anthony said, "but also the fuel, the electricity, needs to be cheap especially compared to oil, gasoline and natural gas."

People who are pushing for greater investment say the spending will pay off by saving people money on monthly bills and preventing the worst effects of climate change.

Consider the following example: If all 330,000 households in San Jose gave up using gasoline and natural gas and switched to electric cars, heat pumps and electric water heaters and stoves, the city would use three times as much electricity as it does now, according to Rewiring America, a nonprofit group that advocates grid upgrades and policies to fight climate change.

But the money San Jose residents and businesses spend on electricity would not necessarily triple or even double, the group contends. That's because people could generate some electricity through rooftop solar panels and store that energy in home batteries. They could install smart thermostats and appliances to use electricity when it costs less, like at night, said Sam Calisch, head of research at Rewiring America.

Emily Fisher, a senior vice president for clean energy at the Edison Electric Institute, a utility industry trade group, gave another example. Mr. Biden wants electric cars to make up [half of new cars sold in the country by 2030](#). If all of those cars were plugged in during the day when energy use is high, utilities would have to spend a lot on upgrades. But if regulators allowed more utilities to offer lower electricity rates at night, people would charge cars when there is plenty of spare capacity.

Some businesses are already finding ways to rely less on the grid when demand is high. Electrify America, a subsidiary of Volkswagen that operates an electric vehicle charging network, has installed large batteries at some charging stations to avoid paying fees that utilities impose on businesses that draw too much power.

Robert Barrosa, senior director of sales and marketing at Electrify America, said that eventually the company could help utilities by taking power when there was too much of it and supplying it when there was not enough of it.

	<p>Ultimately, electrifying cars, heaters, stoves and other equipment currently running on fossil fuels could save an average family \$1,050 to \$2,585 a year, according to Rewiring America. Those products are more energy efficient and electricity tends to cost less than comparable amounts of gasoline, heating oil and natural gas. Electric cars and appliances are also cheaper to maintain.</p> <p>“Done right, money can go further toward a more reliable network,” Mr. Calisch said, “especially in the face of increased stress from climate change.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Nuclear-powered submarines for Australia?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/29/world/australia/nuclear-powered-submarines.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=US%20Politics
GIST	<p>SYDNEY, Australia — When Australia made its trumpet-blast announcement that it would build nuclear-powered submarines with the help of the United States and Britain, the three allies said they would spend the next 18 months sorting out the details of a security collaboration that President Biden celebrated as “historic.”</p> <p>Now, a month into their timetable, the partners are quietly coming to grips with the proposal’s immense complexities. Even supporters say the hurdles are formidable. Skeptics say they could be insurmountable.</p> <p>Australia’s prime minister, Scott Morrison, has laid out an ambitious vision, saying that at least eight nuclear-propelled submarines using American or British technology will be built in Australia and enter the water starting in the late 2030s, replacing its squadron of six aging diesel-powered submarines.</p> <p>For Australia, nuclear-powered submarines offer a powerful means to counter China’s growing naval reach and an escape hatch from a faltering agreement with a French firm to build diesel submarines. For the Biden administration, the plan demonstrates support for a beleaguered ally and shows that it means business in countering Chinese power. And for Britain, the plan could shore up its international standing and military industry after the upheaval of Brexit.</p> <p>But the Rubik’s Cube of interlocking complications that pervades the initiative could slow delivery of the submarines — or, critics say, sunder the whole endeavor — leaving a dangerous gap in Australia’s defenses and calling into question the partnership’s ability to live up to its security promises.</p> <p>“It’s a dangerous pathway we’re treading down,” said Rex Patrick, an independent member of Australia’s Senate who served as a submariner in the Australian Navy for a decade.</p> <p>“What’s at stake is national security,” Mr. Patrick said in an interview. Given the decades-long wait for a squadron of new submarines, he added, Australia risked “buying a parachute for after the plane has crashed.”</p> <p>To pull off the plan, Australia must make major advances. It has a limited industrial base and built its last submarine over 20 years ago. It produces a few graduates in nuclear engineering each year. Its spending on science research as a share of the economy has lagged the average for wealthy economies. Its past two plans to build submarines fell apart before any were made.</p> <p>As well, the United States and Britain face hurdles to expanding production of submarines and their high-precision parts for Australia, and to diverting expert labor to South Australia, where, Mr. Morrison has said, the boats will be assembled. Washington and London have heavy schedules to build submarines for their own navies, including hulking vessels to carry nuclear missiles.</p> <p>“I don’t think this is a done deal in any way, shape or form,” said Marcus Hellyer, an expert on naval policy at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.</p>

“We sometimes use the term nation-building lightly, but this will be a whole-of-nation task,” he said. “The decision to go down this path while burning all of our bridges behind us was quite a brave decision.”

American officials have already spent hundreds of hours in talks with their Australian counterparts and have no illusions about the complexities, said officials involved. Mr. Morrison “has said this is a high-risk program; he was upfront when he announced it,” Greg Moriarty, the secretary of the Australian Department of Defense, [told a Senate committee](#) this week.

Failure or serious delays would ripple beyond Australia. The Biden administration has staked American credibility on building up Australia’s military [as part of](#) an “integrated deterrence” policy that will knit the United States closer to its allies in offsetting China.

“Success would be tremendous for Australia and the U.S., assuming open access to each other’s facilities and what it means in deterring China,” said [Brent Sadler](#), a former U.S. Navy officer who is a senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation. “Failure would be doubly damaging — an alliance that cannot deliver, loss of undersea capacity by a trusted ally and a turn to isolationism on Australia’s part.”

Australia is hoping for a reversal of fortune after more than a decade of misadventures in its submarine-modernization efforts. The plan for French-designed diesel submarines that Mr. Morrison abandoned had succeeded a deal for Japanese-designed submarines that a predecessor championed.

“No living Australian prime minister has commissioned a sub that actually got built,” Greg Sheridan, a columnist for The Australian newspaper, [wrote in a recent article](#) critical of Mr. Morrison’s plan.

Australia’s latest proposal contains many potential pitfalls.

It could turn to the United States to help build something like its Virginia class attack submarine. (Such submarines are nuclear-powered, allowing them to travel faster and stay underwater much longer than diesel ones, but they do not carry nuclear missiles.)

But the two American shipyards that make nuclear submarines, as well as their suppliers, are straining to keep up with orders for the U.S. Navy. The shipyards complete about [two Virginia class boats a year](#) for the Navy and are ramping up to build Columbia class submarines, [21,000-ton](#) vessels that carry nuclear missiles as a roving deterrent — a priority for any administration.

A report to the Senate Armed Services Committee [last month warned](#) that the “nuclear shipbuilding industrial base continues to struggle to support the increased demand” from U.S. orders. That report was prepared too late to take into account the Australian proposal.

“They are working at 95-98 percent on Virginia and Columbia,” Richard V. Spencer, a Navy secretary in the Trump administration, said of the two American submarine shipyards. He supports Australia’s plan and said his preferred path on the first submarines was to galvanize specialized suppliers to ship parts, or whole segments of the submarines, to assemble in Australia.

“Let us all be perfectly aware and wide-eyed that the nuclear program is a massive resource consumer and time consumer, and that’s the given,” he said in a telephone interview.

Other experts have said Australia should choose Britain’s Astute class submarine, which is less expensive and uses a smaller crew than the big American boats. The head of Australia’s nuclear submarine task force, Vice Adm. Jonathan Mead, said this week that his team was considering mature, “in-production designs” from Britain, as well as the United States.

“That de-risks the program,” he [said during a Senate committee hearing](#).

But Britain's submarines have come relatively slowly off its production line, and [often behind schedule](#). Britain's submarine maker, BAE Systems, is also busy building Dreadnought submarines to carry the country's nuclear deterrent.

"Spare capacity is very limited," [Trevor Taylor](#), a professorial research fellow in defense management at the Royal United Services Institute, a research institute, wrote in an email. "The U.K. cannot afford to impose delay on its Dreadnought program in order to divert effort to Australia."

Adding to the complications, Britain has been phasing out the PWR2 reactor that powers the Astute, after officials agreed that the model would "not be acceptable going forward," an [audit report said](#) in 2018. The Astute is not designed to fit the next-generation reactor, and that issue could make it difficult to restart building the submarine for Australia, Mr. Taylor and other experts said.

Britain's successor to the Astute is still on the drawing board; the government said last month that it would [spend three years on design work](#) for it. A naval official in the British Ministry of Defense said that the planned new submarine could fit Australia's timetable well. Several experts were less sure.

"Waiting for the next-generation U.K. or U.S. attack submarine would mean an extended capability gap" for Australia, [Mr. Taylor wrote](#) in an assessment.

The challenge does not stop with building the submarines. Safeguards to protect sailors and populations, and meet nonproliferation obligations, will require a big buildup of Australia's nuclear safety expertise. Residents in some parts of Barrow-in-Furness, the [town of 67,000](#) that is home to Britain's submarine-building shipyard, are [handed iodine tablets](#) as a precaution against possible leaks when reactors are tested. The Osborne shipyard in South Australia, where Mr. Morrison wants to build the nuclear submarines, sits on the edge of Adelaide, a city of 1.4 million.

Australia [operates one small nuclear reactor](#). Its sole university program dedicated to nuclear engineering produces about five graduates every year, said [Edward Obbard](#), the leader of the program at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. Australia would need many thousands more people with nuclear training and experience if it wants the submarines, he said.

"The ramp-up has to start now," he said.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Bad omen: China new climate pledge
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/climate/china-climate-pledge.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Climate%20and%20Environment
GIST	<p>China formalized the pledges its leader announced last year, but the country went no further, in an official update of its targets to fight climate change, which were submitted on Thursday with the United Nations climate change agency.</p> <p>It foreshadows a grim start to the international climate talks in Glasgow next week, considering that China's emissions account for the largest share in the world right now. It reflects the political and economic challenges within China in pivoting away from fossil fuels. China burns more coal than every other country combined in order to power its factories and produce the massive amounts of steel and cement used in its construction projects.</p> <p>And so what China does, from now to 2030, is crucial to global efforts to slow down catastrophic climate change.</p> <p>The updated Nationally Determined Contribution, or NDC, as it is called, commits to four main things that China's leader, Xi Jinping, outlined nearly a year ago: China would peak its emissions of carbon dioxide, a key planet-warming greenhouse gas produced by the combustion of oil, gas and coal, before 2030; it would also lower the carbon emissions intensity of its economy by 65 percent compared with 2005 levels;</p>

it would ensure that renewable energy sources make up a fourth of its energy mix; and it would increase its forest cover.

None of these are new. They were all announced by Mr. Xi in December 2020, and they fall far short of what many climate advocates inside and outside China had hoped for.

John Kerry, the United States climate envoy, said on Thursday morning, “It doesn’t advance the ball sufficiently.”

The latest scientific research says global greenhouse gas emissions must be nearly halved by 2030 to avert the worst consequences of climate change, or keep global average temperature rise to below 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, compared with the beginning of the industrial era. The world has already seen its average temperature rise by 1 degree Celsius.

The United States has produced the largest share of global emissions cumulatively, since the start of the industrial age. China produces the largest share of global emissions currently.

Li Shuo, the policy adviser for Greenpeace China, said Beijing had “missed an opportunity to demonstrate ambition.”

“China’s decision casts a shadow on the global climate effort,” Mr. Li said. “The planet can’t afford this being the last word. Beijing needs to come up with stronger implementation plans to ensure an emission peak before 2025.”

Bernice Lee, a China expert at the think tank Chatham House in London, called China’s plans part of “a wide malaise” among big economies that were failing to make emissions cuts immediately, as the scientific consensus demands. “We can’t sugarcoat it: Beijing’s new climate plan is disappointing,” she said in a statement. “China has lowballed its target and missed a chance to be recognized as a global leader.”

China has taken many steps in the past five years to slow its growth in emissions of greenhouse gases. But the country’s efforts have run into trouble this autumn.

Electricity demand has continued to increase strongly as China captures a larger share of the global market for manufactured goods. Widespread electricity shortages and even blackouts that began last month spurred an expansion of coal use. This month, the government said it would expand production capacity by 220 million metric tons of coal per year, for an increase in output of nearly 6 percent.

“With the continuation of industrialization and urbanization,” China’s submission to the United Nations climate agency reads, “energy demand will keep rising while it is unlikely to fundamentally change the coal-dominated energy mix in the short term.”

Mr. Xi faces political and economic constraints even after consolidating enormous personal power. The entire Chinese economy is slowing under the weight of debt that has rapidly been accumulating since the global financial crisis in 2008 and 2009. Manufacturing, particularly for export markets, has been the strongest area left of the Chinese economy. But factories also consume 70 percent of China’s electricity, making them the obvious targets for rationing and higher prices during the recent electricity shortages.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Japan daily virus cases dramatically fall
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/world/asia/japan-covid-drop.html
GIST	In mid-August, Japan was recording over 20,000 daily coronavirus cases, its highest levels during the pandemic. On Wednesday, it reported just 310 nationwide.

About 70 percent of the eligible population has been fully vaccinated, the government announced Wednesday, and life in the country has returned to a state of cautious optimism and near normalcy from one of acute concern. Tokyo has lifted nearly all restrictions on daily life, and the subways, streets and shopping arcades are once again filled with people. The city has reported fewer than 50 daily cases for over a week.

Experts in Japan are unclear about what caused the precipitous drop in cases, although they agree that high vaccination levels and ubiquitous masking are probably the most important factors keeping the virus at bay.

In remarks to reporters on Wednesday, government experts said other factors, such as cooler weather, an effective testing regime and heightened caution during the recent surge in cases, may have also contributed to the sudden drop in cases.

They noted that asymptomatic cases of the virus also seemed to be on the wane.

Testing levels in the country, however, are significantly lower than in its peer countries, which could mean an underreporting of cases. At the peak, Japan was performing only around 270,000 tests a day.

Unlike other countries, Japan had never gone into lockdown or put compulsory restrictions on people's behavior. Instead, the government placed the country under a succession of national emergencies in which the authorities called businesses to voluntarily shorten their hours and urged citizens to reduce the amount of time they spent outside.

Nevertheless, infection levels in the country have remained relatively low through the pandemic, peaking at around 23,000 in late August before rapidly dropping. Total deaths in Japan stand at just over 18,200.

Despite the current low infection levels, government experts warn that the country could experience a new surge in cases in the winter as more activities move indoors. In preparation, officials say they will ease access to testing and increase the number of hospital beds available for coronavirus patients.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Covid-19 vaccine breakthrough cases
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/10/28/us/covid-breakthrough-cases.html
GIST	<p>After a summer of reports of breakthrough coronavirus infections, when it seemed that everyone knew someone who tested positive after vaccination, recently released federal data sheds light on how common these cases really were, how severe they became and who was most at risk.</p> <p>Compared with the unvaccinated, fully vaccinated people overall had a much lower chance of testing positive for the virus or dying from it, even through the summer's Delta surge and the relaxation of pandemic restrictions in many parts of the country. But the data indicates that immunity against infection may be slowly waning for vaccinated people, even as the vaccines continue to be strongly protective against severe illness and death.</p> <p>"The No. 1 take-home message is that these vaccines are still working," said Dr. David Dowdy, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "If you saw these data for any disease other than Covid, what everyone's eyes would be drawn to is the difference between the unvaccinated and fully vaccinated lines."</p> <p>The data shows notable differences in breakthrough death rates by age and slight differences in both case and death rates by vaccine brand, trends that experts say are important to consider as tens of millions of Americans weigh whether to get a booster shot.</p>

The [data](#), from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is based on health department records from 14 states and two cities. A [second dashboard](#) reveals similar trends for hospitalized patients with and without vaccination.

All vaccinated age groups saw similar rates of breakthrough infection, and they all had much lower rates of infection and death compared with their unvaccinated peers.

While every age group had similar rates of breakthrough cases, death rates varied more drastically by age. Unvaccinated seniors were the most likely to die from Covid of any group. Still, vaccinated people 80 and older had higher death rates than unvaccinated people under 50.

“Age is our top risk factor for vaccine breakthrough deaths,” said Theresa Sokol, the state epidemiologist in Louisiana, one of the jurisdictions that contributed to the C.D.C. data.

Breakthrough deaths among seniors may be because of immunosenescence, or the weakening of the immune system in older people, said Heather Scobie, an epidemiologist at the C.D.C. who helps lead the team that produced the new data.

“They don’t usually form as robust a response to vaccination,” added Dr. Scobie. “Hopefully the booster dose for ages 65 years and older will address that issue.”

The federal data also makes it clear that all three brands of vaccine administered in the United States substantially reduced rates of cases and deaths. But among those vaccinated, Johnson & Johnson recipients had slightly higher rates of breakthrough cases and related deaths. And Pfizer-BioNTech recipients had slightly higher rates than those who got Moderna.

Similar data from scientific studies helped shape the new federal recommendation that all [Johnson & Johnson](#) recipients, 18 and older, receive a booster dose at least two months after getting the first shot, said Dr. Scobie.

In contrast, booster shot [recommendations](#) for those who got the [Pfizer](#) or [Moderna](#) vaccine are focused on high-risk groups, including those over 65, and younger adults at greater risk of severe Covid-19 because of [medical conditions](#) or where they work.

The C.D.C. data, which will be updated monthly, is the closest yet to a detailed, nationally representative view of breakthrough cases and deaths. States are not required to report this information — though [many do in myriad formats](#) — and the C.D.C. had previously only provided [estimates](#) of total breakthrough hospitalizations and deaths.

The data can also give scientists a crude understanding of the [effectiveness of the vaccine](#) over time. If the ratio of cases or deaths among the unvaccinated to those among the vaccinated holds steady, the vaccines are thought to be maintaining their protection.

For example, the ratio of case rates declined somewhat in the summer, to six times as high for the unvaccinated in August from about 11 times as high in mid-June, giving scientists reason to believe that the vaccine’s protection against infection might be waning slightly. The ratio for deaths has been flatter over time for all but the oldest age groups, an indication that vaccine protection against death is holding strong.

The C.D.C. data so far runs through early September and captures only the crest of the Delta wave. But data from states like [New York](#) and [California](#) shows similar patterns through September and October. That suggests that the vaccines, despite some slight differences among the brands, are still working to protect against the most severe outcomes.

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SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/nyregion/nyc-police-vaccine-mandate.html
GIST	<p>City officials are bracing for the possibility that thousands of essential workers — including police officers, firefighters and sanitation employees — could be placed on unpaid leave starting Monday, when the city’s sweeping mandate requiring that almost all municipal workers receive at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine takes effect.</p> <p>With just over one-third of the workers in the Fire and Sanitation Departments, and one-quarter of the police force, yet to prove that they had been vaccinated as of Thursday morning, city agencies were putting in place an array of contingency plans, including mandating overtime for vaccinated workers and canceling vacations to fill staffing gaps.</p> <p>Mayor Bill de Blasio, a Democrat in his second term who issued the mandate, predicted on Thursday that many city workers would get a shot at the last minute, as happened just before similar mandates took effect in recent months for health care workers and school employees.</p> <p>“I am not having second thoughts,” Mr. de Blasio said, adding that he was confident the city would not face serious disruptions. “We expected that a lot of the vaccinations would happen toward the end of the deadline.”</p> <p>But defiance of the mandate is running high among some workers. In a protest outside the mayor’s residence, Gracie Mansion, on Thursday, many demonstrators wore sweatshirts and shirts bearing Fire Department engine and ladder company numbers from across the city. Union leaders led chants of “Hold the line!” and took aim at Mr. de Blasio for ordering vaccinations on what they said was too short a timeline.</p> <p>Andrew Ansbro, the president of the Uniformed Firefighters Association, a firefighters’ union, said he had instructed all his members — vaccinated or not — to come to work on Monday in hopes of demonstrating that if any are turned away, the possible loss of life caused by understaffing would be on the mayor’s head.</p> <p>“It’s his choice to put the lives he’s entrusted with in jeopardy,” Mr. Ansbro told the protesters.</p> <p>With the mayoral election looming next Tuesday, Curtis Sliwa, the Republican contender and an opponent of the vaccine mandate, also attended Thursday’s protest and said that there would soon be “garbage everywhere” if sanitation workers stay home.</p> <p>“The city is in bad shape now, and it’ll be in worse shape when you call 911,” Mr. Sliwa said.</p> <p>The Democratic mayoral nominee and overwhelming favorite, Eric Adams, the Brooklyn borough president, supports the mandate, but he has said he would have worked more closely with unions than Mr. de Blasio did to implement it.</p> <p>The mandate applies to roughly 160,000 city employees at some three dozen agencies, including some with very high vaccination rates among their staff, such as the Landmarks Preservation Commission, with a perfect 100 percent, and the Mayor’s Office at 96 percent. An additional 140,000 city workers, mainly hospital, public health and school employees, were already required to be vaccinated under earlier mandates.</p> <p>New York is one of the first major American cities to require that its entire work force receive the vaccination — without the option of getting regular coronavirus tests instead. San Francisco set a similar vaccine mandate for its 35,000 city workers, which goes into effect on Monday, and Los Angeles and Chicago have been pushing public workers to get vaccinated. Among states, Washington and Massachusetts are requiring state employees to be fully vaccinated.</p>

All workers placed on unpaid leave can return to work as soon as they show proof of a first vaccine dose, the city has said. The city has not yet announced how long workers may stay on leave before they are fired, and expects to work that out with the unions.

Dire predictions of job loss also preceded each of the last two vaccine mandates — one for the tens of thousands of Department of Education employees, which went into effect on Oct. 4, and again for over a million health care workers across the state, which went into effect around the same time.

In each case, thousands of holdouts appeared for shots at the last minute — and in some cases, after the deadlines — boosting vaccination rates among health care and education employees to around 95 percent, the city said.

Mayor de Blasio said he was counting on the same thing happening again with the city's remaining unvaccinated workers, who numbered 46,000 as of last week. The official deadline for their first dose is Friday at 5 p.m., but unvaccinated workers can work though the weekend before being put on unpaid leave on Monday.

And workers who show up on Monday with proof of vaccination will be allowed to work.

Unions representing police officers and firefighters have filed lawsuits in New York and in other cities to block vaccine mandates. In New York, an 11th-hour challenge from the Police Benevolent Association failed to persuade a state judge on Wednesday to issue a temporary restraining order against the mandate.

Requests for medical or religious exemptions for city workers were due on Wednesday, and employees who applied will be permitted to work if they undergo weekly testing while their cases are considered. That may provide a partial cushion against employee shortfalls in the short-term.

But Mr. de Blasio has made clear that in the long term, only limited exemptions will be granted.

Freddi Goldstein, a spokeswoman for District Council 37, the city's largest municipal labor union, said the union was trying to help its workers "get religious and medical exemptions where appropriate, and for others we want to make sure they maintain health insurance and, in some cases, can receive unemployment if they choose to fully separate from city service."

All the holdout workers were also offered \$500 as a bonus if they got vaccinated by the end of the workday Friday. Mr. de Blasio said he was offering the cash "out of respect for the people who've done so much for us."

Some were taking advantage; on Thursday over 700 police officers got vaccinated, the department announced. The Fire Department said that its overall vaccination rate as of Thursday night had jumped to 71 percent from 68 percent on Wednesday. But among other holdouts, the incentive did not resonate.

"The mayor seems to have forgotten the sacrifices we made during the pandemic," said Oren Barzilay, head of the city's Emergency Medical Services workers union, at the protest. "Not seeing family members for months on end, long-term health effects and even death. We had a choice then, and our members chose to come to work despite the hazards. Where is our choice now?"

Until Oct. 20, it was acceptable for unvaccinated city workers to get tested weekly instead of getting vaccinated. Giving them only one week to change gears and get a shot was too quick, said Gregory Floyd, president of Teamsters Local 237, which represents more than 18,000 municipal workers in New York City.

"Two more weeks should be given for those unvaccinated workers to decide on what is best for themselves and their families," he said.

Police Commissioner Dermot F. Shea said on Wednesday the Police Department was preparing for potentially significant officer shortages and had been asking officers to work double shifts and overtime.

Fire officials are preparing for the absence of up to 20 percent of ambulances from the streets and the closure of one-fifth of fire stations on Monday.

“We will use all means at our disposal, including mandatory overtime, mutual aid from other E.M.S. providers, and significant changes to the schedules of our members,” Fire Commissioner Daniel A. Nigro said in a statement.

Fire officials said they had held virtual meetings with uniformed staff, urging them to get vaccinated. The officials will reassign workers from desk roles to positions in the field. Officials also canceled scheduled vacations after Nov. 1 in preparation. Emergency medical workers from private hospitals and volunteer services are expected to fill staffing gaps.

Uniformed correction officers have an extra month — until Dec. 1 — to get vaccinated. Mr. de Blasio said they were not subject to the Nov. 1 deadline because of a severe staffing shortage at the Rikers Island jail complex.

As the rally on Thursday broke up and the crowd dwindled down to a few dozen people, Kem Farmer, a paramedic from the Bronx, said he would continue to show up at work unvaccinated because he didn’t trust the shots, “and if they send me home, they send me home.”

With 33 years on the job, Mr. Farmer, 62, said he had enough savings to cover his bills for four months. He is also eligible to retire if it comes to it. He acknowledged that less senior co-workers don’t have the same options.

“All the new kids coming in, I tell them, ‘If you have to, take the vaccination,’” he said. “But there are still a lot of young holdouts that are saying, ‘I’m going to wait until the last minute.’”

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HEADLINE	10/28 Florida sues US govt over vaccine mandate
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/28/world/covid-vaccine-boosters?type=style-live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0#florida-desantis-lawsuit-vaccine-mandate
GIST	<p>Calling a rule that federal contractors must show proof of Covid-19 vaccination or submit to weekly testing a “heavy-handed mandate,” Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida announced on Thursday that his administration was suing the federal government to challenge the requirement.</p> <p>The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Tampa, seeks to block a Dec. 8 deadline imposed by the Biden administration for federal contractors to get vaccinated.</p> <p>Legal experts say the federal government has broad authority to address a public health crisis like the pandemic with measures like vaccine mandates and that such suits have little chance of succeeding. The Supreme Court has turned away legal challenges to vaccine mandates at Indiana University and for health care workers in Maine.</p> <p>Mr. DeSantis, a Republican, spoke at a news conference at the Florida Air Museum in Lakeland, in a nod to the state’s aerospace contractors. Among the named defendants in the lawsuit are NASA and its administrator, Bill Nelson, a former U.S. senator from Florida.</p> <p>“We’ve got a very big footprint of companies that do contracting work for the federal government,” Mr. DeSantis said about his state. “There’s a lot of folks that will be in the cross hairs on this.”</p> <p>Joining Mr. DeSantis at the news conference were the state’s attorney general, Ashley Moody, and several contractors and their relatives. One contractor who provides vending machines to federal and state</p>

buildings said that he had not yet gotten a shot because he was “waiting for more information” on vaccinations.

Information about Covid vaccines has been issued by [vaccine makers](#), [the Food and Drug Administration](#), the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and [many news organizations](#).

Mr. Biden told would-be litigants against his vaccine plan to “have at it” after he [announced it in September](#). And several Republican governors have [vowed to](#) do just that.

Lawrence O. Gostin, a Georgetown University law professor who specializes in public health, wrote in an email that “DeSantis will almost certainly lose this lawsuit.”

Mr. Gostin said he expected that Biden’s order to vaccinate federal workers and contractors would stand, even in states that have banned vaccine mandates, because under the Constitution’s supremacy clause federal rules pre-empt state and local dictates.

“The president is the head of the federal workforce,” Mr. Gostin wrote. “Just like any business or employer, he has the clear power to set reasonable, evidence-based rules to ensure a safe and productive workforce.”

Lawsuits like Mr. DeSantis’s are politically motivated, and are damaging because they feed public doubts about vaccination, Mr. Gostin said.

Mr. Gostin said that he thought mandates that do not include religious exemptions, like one for health care workers in New York State, could be more legally vulnerable.

“I feel strongly there is no legal requirement to offer religious exemptions, but the Supreme Court is highly sensitive to religious claims,” Mr. Gostin said.

Mr. DeSantis faces re-election next year, and is considered to be a leading hopeful for the Republican presidential nomination in 2024 in the absence of a bid by former President Donald J. Trump, who won the state in the last two elections. For months, Mr. DeSantis has been a forceful opponent of all Covid vaccine requirements.

This year, the Florida Legislature and Mr. DeSantis prohibited businesses from requiring customers to show proof of vaccination. Mr. DeSantis has said he intends to call a special legislative session to ban employers from requiring employees to be vaccinated. He also vowed on Thursday that Florida — which [requires that students at both public and private schools get at least six kinds of vaccinations](#), including those for diphtheria, measles and hepatitis B — would not require schoolchildren to get Covid shots.

On Thursday in Lakeland, Mr. DeSantis stood behind a lectern with a sign that read “Protect Florida Jobs,” and warned of a wave of attrition if federal vaccine mandates are allowed to take effect. “We are not going to deny people their ability to make a living based on their decision about an injection,” he said.

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HEADLINE	10/28 SKorea phased reopen despite rising cases
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/28/world/covid-vaccine-boosters?type=stylIn-live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0#south-korea-to-move-ahead-with-phased-reopening-despite-rising-cases-and-other-news-from-around-the-world
GIST	Only days before South Korea plans to implement its phased recovery plan to “live with Covid,” the country recorded 2,111 daily new cases, a record in almost three weeks. The uptick of several hundred has been alarming to some citizens, but an increase in available hospital beds for severely ill patients compared to earlier in the year indicates that the country is still on the right track in battling the pandemic.

While the local cases have increased, intensive care units in hospitals are much emptier than they were before, says Jerome Kim, director general of the International Vaccine Institute in Seoul, who added on that earlier in the year nearly all of the ICU beds were full. “Now, they are not.”

At a live briefing session earlier this month, Lee Gi-il of the Korean Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasure Headquarters said in a press briefing that “the medical response system remains somewhat stable,” adding on that [52 percent of hospital beds](#) were available to treat critically ill patients.

President Moon Jae-in announced [earlier this week](#) that the country had reached its vaccination goals of 70 percent and would be starting the gradual return to normal life “in earnest” starting next month, allowing for businesses to operate past 10 p.m. and people to gather in certain regions up to groups of 10.

While a spike of several hundred cases might not have even garnered much attention in the United States, which has recorded over [740,000 deaths](#) from the virus compared to South Korea’s [2,808](#), such an increase in cases could potentially shift quarantine and social distancing regulations as it has in the past.

“South Korea has had a very graded approach toward the coronavirus,” said Dr. Kim. He also mentioned that the government has changed its social distancing regulations based on the changes in numbers. He added that South Korean people are affected by these numbers, as such changes in regulations directly impacts their daily lives.

The nation, which has faced four waves of the virus since the beginning of last year, is in its worst surge, which started in July. Despite this, Dr. Kim says that the country has done “very well” in terms of handling the pandemic, mentioning the country’s low death rate and its ability to grow its economy throughout the past year. According to the Bank of Korea, the nation’s central bank, the South Korean GDP saw a [4 percent year-on-year growth](#) as of this month.

While an easing of restrictions will allow for business owners and consumers to enjoy an opening up of the economy, health care experts urge the public to use personal discretion in preventing the possibility for further outbreaks. “Living with Covid is going to be complicated,” said Dr. Kim. “There is no one answer key.”

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HEADLINE	10/28 Global setback: childhood vaccinations
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/28/world/covid-vaccine-boosters?type=stylIn-live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0#polio-measles-vaccinations-covid
GIST	<p>The pandemic dealt a serious setback to global efforts to immunize children against diseases like measles and polio, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported on Thursday, reducing worldwide coverage for some vaccines to levels not seen since more than a decade ago.</p> <p>The proportion of eligible children who received a polio vaccine fell to 83 percent in 2020 from 86 percent the year before, as did coverage with the third dose of the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine, known as DTP3. Coverage with the measles vaccine also dipped slightly, to 84 percent last year from 86 percent in 2019.</p> <p>Those setbacks, while seemingly small, meant that millions more children missed out on routine immunizations during the pandemic, putting them and their communities at risk.</p> <p>Globally, nearly 23 million children targeted for the DTP3 shot were not vaccinated in 2020, compared with 19 million in 2019, the C.D.C. said. The vast majority of those had not received a single dose of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine. Not since 2009 had coverage with that vaccine been so low.</p>

Return to Top	<p>The C.D.C. scientists involved in the report called for action to be taken to address the immunity gaps of preventable diseases in countries already saddled with Covid outbreaks. Scientists from the World Health Organization and UNICEF also were co-authors on the study.</p> <p>The decline in vaccinations follows a decade of stagnant immunization levels. In 2019, measles deaths swelled to their highest levels in 23 years, a consequence of what public health experts described as insufficient vaccination coverage. Scientists said that the pandemic had hampered the tracking of measles outbreaks.</p> <p>The pandemic also disrupted immunization programs, the C.D.C. report said, interrupting the supply of basic vaccines and making it more difficult to administer them.</p> <p>Immunization levels for diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis and measles were lowest in much of Africa, the report said. The W.H.O. also said on Thursday that only five of Africa's 54 nations were expected to reach a year-end goal of vaccinating 40 percent of their people against Covid. UNICEF, a United Nations agency working to distribute coronavirus vaccines, warned of a shortfall next year in syringes for both Covid and routine vaccinations.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 WHO: Africa struggles; syringe shortages
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/10/28/world/covid-vaccine-boosters?type=styl-live-updates&label=coronavirus%20updates&index=0#africa-syringe-shortages-who
GIST	<p>As countries across Africa struggle to vaccinate 1.3 billion people, the continent faces another obstacle besides a lagging supply of doses: the looming likelihood of a shortage of syringes.</p> <p>“Early next year, Covid-19 vaccines will start pouring into Africa, but a scarcity of syringes could paralyze progress” Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, the W.H.O.’s regional director for Africa, said at a news briefing. “Drastic measures must be taken to boost syringe production, fast. Countless African lives depend on it.”</p> <p>Rwanda, South Africa and Kenya have already reported delays in receiving supplies of syringes, according to the W.H.O.</p> <p>Covax, a global vaccine-sharing initiative that is working to supply many African countries with doses, is now seeking agreements with syringe manufacturers and trying to plan to keep vaccine deliveries from outpacing the availability of needles.</p> <p>Africa has the lowest vaccination rate of any continent, and the W.H.O. estimates that about 59 million of the continent's population have been infected with the coronavirus since the beginning of the pandemic, though only somewhat more than eight million cases have been officially recorded.</p> <p>Unless “drastic measures” are taken to accelerate vaccinations, the organization said, only five African countries are projected to meet the target set by the W.H.O.: fully vaccinating 40 percent of their populations by the end of the year. Most of Africa’s more than 50 countries already missed the W.H.O.’s target of vaccinating 10 percent of their populations by the end of September.</p> <p>Wealthier countries have monopolized vaccine supplies, creating global inequities in distribution. Those inequities are only likely to be deepened as those same wealthier nations, including the United States, roll out booster campaigns.</p> <p>By contrast, vaccine deliveries via Covax ground to a halt after India imposed export restrictions on doses as it dealt with its own resurgence this year. In September, regional health experts said that the unpredictability of the limited supply of doses reaching African nations added more obstacles. Some shipments, they said, were within two or three months of expiring — a shelf life too short for some health</p>

	systems to reliably deploy, and one that many ordinary people interpreted as a signal of poor quality, contributing to vaccine hesitancy.
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HEADLINE	10/28 Meatpacking cases, deaths underreported
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/world/meatpacking-workers-covid-cases-deaths.html
GIST	<p>Employees at meatpacking plants are considered essential workers in the United States, so when others stayed home early in the pandemic, they kept working, often standing elbow to elbow in processing lines with little room for social distancing. And meatpacking workers are known to have been among the hardest hit by the coronavirus of any occupation.</p> <p>But lawmakers now say the impact was far worse than previously believed, with triple the number of infections and deaths at five of the country's largest meatpacking conglomerates, where some major facilities became major hot spots early in the pandemic.</p> <p>A congressional report, based on newly obtained documents from the nation's five largest meat processing companies, found that between March 1, 2020, and Feb. 1, 2021, roughly 59,000 workers contracted the coronavirus, nearly three times the 22,700 infections estimated over a longer period, between April 2020 and September 2021, by the Food and Environment Reporting Network, a nonprofit news organization whose data on the industry has been widely cited.</p> <p>The House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis, which published the report on Wednesday, said that 269 deaths were recorded among plant workers in that time, triple the reporting network's earlier estimates.</p> <p>The group based its data on publicly available information from the five companies that control more than 80 percent of the U.S. market for beef and more than 60 percent of the market for pork: JBS USA, Tyson Foods, Smithfield Foods, Cargill, and National Beef.</p> <p>The lawmakers said the companies could have taken more steps to keep coronavirus infections and deaths at bay in their plants.</p> <p>"Instead of addressing the clear indications that workers were contracting the coronavirus at alarming rates due to conditions in meatpacking facilities, meatpacking companies prioritized profits and production over worker safety, continuing to employ practices that led to crowded facilities in which the virus spread easily," the report said.</p> <p>The committee identified plants where the virus spread the most in the pandemic's first year, including a JBS plant in Hyrum, Utah, where 54 percent of employees contracted Covid-19. Half the workers at Tyson's plant in Amarillo, Texas, contracted Covid-19, the report said, as did 44 percent of workers at the National Beef facility in Tama, Iowa.</p> <p>The industry operates largely in rural areas, and depends disproportionately on Black and Latino immigrants to do the low-wage work of cutting, deboning and packing the chicken, beef and pork that reaches American dinner tables.</p> <p>Meat processors faced criticism last year for a lack of worker protections. Many workers died as the virus swept through processing plants, some of which were forced to close temporarily. Workers staged walkouts over concerns that they were not being properly protected.</p> <p>Some plants installed dividers between work stations and slowed their production lines in order to widen the space between workers. A few companies also offered financial incentives to keep workers on the job.</p> <p>Tyson said it had spent more than \$700 million on Covid safety measures and on introducing on-site medical services to its plants. The company announced this week that 96 percent of its workers were vaccinated.</p>

HEADLINE	10/28 France detains British trawler amid dispute
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/world/europe/france-detains-british-boat.html
GIST	<p>PARIS — French authorities said Thursday that they had detained a British fishing trawler, prompting the government in London to summon France’s ambassador for talks, escalating months of rising tension between the two nations.</p> <p>The confrontation was the latest in a series of cross-Channel flare-ups over post-Brexit fishing rights that have led to accusations of bad faith, threats and even a brief naval standoff in May between the two NATO allies.</p> <p>Thursday’s moves will likely stoke tensions in French-British affairs that have become increasingly frayed as both nations have tried to define a new relationship after Britain’s departure last year from the European Union.</p> <p>French leaders were infuriated in September when the United States and Britain announced a deal to develop nuclear-powered submarines for Australia, prompting Australia to cancel a French contract to build conventional submarines. The episode played into longstanding French concerns about the English-speaking nations looking out for their own interests, without regard for their European allies.</p> <p>But the most persistent irritant between the two neighbors has been a dispute over fishing rights that has ballooned into a diplomatic feud around how to implement a post-Brexit agreement — an issue that both French and British officials hoped they had put behind them.</p> <p>The agreement, struck in December, provides that European fishermen can keep working in some British waters if they can prove that they were fishing there before Brexit. But French and British authorities have been arguing over the nature and extent of the documentation required, and Britain has refused permission to dozens of French boats.</p> <p>After weeks of warning that it would take retaliatory measures, a French patrol vessel, checking on fishing vessels near the port of Le Havre on Wednesday night, fined two British trawlers, and detained one of them at the port because it did not have a license to operate in French waters, the maritime ministry said.</p> <p>The ministry said the detained vessel, the Cornelis Gert Jan, could have its catch seized and could be held pending payment of a monetary penalty, and its captain could be subject to additional punishment.</p> <p>A day earlier, French authorities had said that if the situation did not improve by Nov. 2, France would close most of its ports to British fishing boats and would increase customs and health checks on goods crossing the Channel. They added that further measures could be considered, including reviewing energy supplies to Britain.</p> <p>“Now, we have to speak the language of force, because, unfortunately, this British government only understands that,” Clément Beaune, France’s minister for European affairs, told CNews TV on Thursday. Britain’s foreign secretary, Liz Truss, tweeted, “I have instructed Europe Minister Wendy Morton to summon the French Ambassador to the UK for talks tomorrow to explain the disappointing and disproportionate threats made against the UK and Channel Islands.”</p> <p>David Frost, Britain’s Brexit secretary, wrote on Twitter that his country had “granted 98 percent of license applications from EU vessels to fish in our waters.”</p> <p>But on Thursday, Annick Girardin, France’s maritime minister, said the true figure was 90 percent, and that almost all of the boats that have not received British licenses were French.</p> <p>Fishing was one of the thorniest issues when Britain negotiated its new trade agreement with the European Union, which took effect in January. It ended decades during which Britain’s fishing fleet was under the</p>

	<p>same E.U. system as France's, with their catches negotiated regularly among the member countries — though even then, they clashed over whether the rules were fair, or were being followed.</p> <p>“This isn't a war, but it's a fight,” Ms. Girardin told RTL radio on Thursday. “French fishermen have rights, a deal was signed and we must implement this deal.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Climate change impact global economy
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/climate-change-heat-global-warming-economy/
GIST	<p>Even the most promising solutions to climate change often run smack into the challenge of how to pay for them. As the United Nations' COP26 summit kicks off in Scotland on Sunday, questions about whether poorer countries can afford to reduce their emissions for the global good and whether richer countries — which account for the vast majority of the world's carbon emissions — are doing enough to help them are expected to take center stage.</p> <p>Yet the cost of fighting climate change must be weighed against the staggering economic toll of losing the war. Indeed, the financial damage from runaway climate change could surpass the amount of money that currently exists on the planet, according to one estimate.</p> <p>Today, global warming had already reduced U.S. economic output by about 1% — or \$200 billion, according to a study published in 2017 in the journal Science. But as the mercury rises, the costs increase exponentially. If the global temperature reaches 4 degrees Celsius by 2100 — described by experts as a catastrophic scenario — the costs per degree would soar by a factor of four, the same study predicts. In other words, if the world continues on its current trajectory to reach 4 degrees of warming, that change could cause 10 times the economic damage.</p> <p>In that future world, climate damage would lead to nearly \$1 trillion in costs by the end of the century, said Amir Jina, an environmental economist at the University of Chicago and one of the authors of the Science paper, calling it "a worst-case scenario." Other research puts the price tag even higher, with the U.S. potentially losing \$2 trillion in growth by 2100 if greenhouse gases soar.</p> <p>As experts try to quantify the economic costs of large-scale planetary destruction, more Americans are waking up to the risks. Almost two-thirds now think addressing climate change should be a top priority, the Pew Research Center found in May, and a majority of the U.S. public supports paying for policies that would curb climate change, an AP-NORC poll revealed this month.</p> <p>Economists are quick to point out the tremendous uncertainty inherent in trying to peer 50 years or 70 years into the future to forecast potential economic trends. To simplify that process, they leave out massive planetary changes, such as large-scale species extinctions, that are beyond our ability to compute, while also generally setting aside predictions on how humanity would react to the extreme floods, storms, drought and migrations that higher temperatures have already begun unleashing on the world.</p> <p>Yet one lesson consistently emerges through the scientific fog: The current economic fallout from climate change is nothing compared to what the planet faces if temperatures continue to rise.</p> <p>Here are some of the major economic, environmental and social effects experts say the U.S. and other countries around the world could face at every degree the earth's temperature rises as a result of global warming.</p> <p>1.1 degrees: Rising inequality, shifting deaths</p> <p>"As the temperature increases, each extra bit of temperature increase is much worse than the previous temperature increase," said Jina. As carbon concentrations in the atmosphere rise, "things can kind of start to spiral."</p>

At the lower end of the warming scale, including the 1.1 degree increase humans have already caused since the mid-19th century, the distributional effects of climate change vary by region. As crops in Central America fail from heat stress, for example, previously inaccessible tracts of [Canadian soil](#) become suitable for farming. Similarly, while coastal real estate takes a hit, sales of air-conditioning units soar. While it is hard to estimate the precise human toll of such shifts on different parts of the globe, in terms of overall economic output the changes may somewhat cancel each other out.

The tracking of climate change-induced human mortality rates has revealed a similar shift, as climate change has already begun to redraw the map of where people die from heat or cold. While severe heat and cold are both hazardous to people's health, record-hot days are rising at twice the rate of record-cold [days](#), according to recent research. That means, at this level of global warming, fewer deaths from record-cold temperatures are likely to temper an increase in deaths from record heat.

"As the United States warms up, as it gets more heat waves, we also get fewer extremely cold days, and so we're losing something which is harming people on the cold side," Jina said. "For a while, across the United States, these two things kind of net out."

Of course, such events are anything but a wash at the level of actual lives. This year alone, hundreds of people died in the [Pacific Northwest in extreme heat](#), while deaths rose after a [seemingly freakish Texas ice storm](#) because neither region was equipped to handle the unusual swings in temperature.

"Suddenly you're shifting health from one part of the country to the other. And that's not something you should take lightly," Jina said. "Just because, on net, the answer for the first degree of warming and our research shows that there's very little change in overall mortality, doesn't mean that it's not a really important issue. You're shifting this away from people who currently adapt to that heat to people who probably can't adapt to heat so much."

Predicting how well communities will adapt as the planet gets hotter is difficult because it's hard to know what specific adjustments regions will eventually make to cope with a warming planet, A. Patrick Behrer, a postdoctoral scholar at the Center of Food Security and the Environment at Stanford, [previously told](#) CBS MoneyWatch.

"There will be ways in which we're able to adapt and ways in which we're not able to adapt, and it's hard to predict exactly how that's going to play out," Behrer said.

1.5 — 2 degrees: Failing crops, failing bodies, bigger storms

Today, people are already shifting food production. French winemakers are moving to southern [England](#), while farmers in North Dakota are swapping out wheat for [corn](#) as the climate rises and humidity-sensitive crop yields dwindle. Meanwhile, populations of Alaskan salmon are [shrinking](#) as local waters warm.

Yet, while farmers are trying to adapt, future climate changes are likely to lead to major drops in grain production, notably for corn and rice, scientists say, as other areas get even hotter. Under one scenario, the Midwest could lose as much as one-fifth of its corn production in [30 years](#).

Corn, the most abundant grain in the U.S., falters when temperatures reach about 86 degrees Fahrenheit (30 Celsius). "Where you start to see temperatures exceed that, it really damages those crops. Yields start to decline a little bit each time the temperature exceeds that threshold," Jina said. With "more exposure to more of those days across summer, across a growing season, the yield is going to get hurt even more."

At 2 degrees of global warming, global agriculture yields would drop by an average of 5%, according to research from the University of East [Anglia](#). The ice sheet covering Greenland would also likely [melt](#), eventually boosting [sea levels by six to 10 feet](#), reshaping coastlines around the world.

Extreme weather disasters, which cost the U.S. about \$95 [billion](#) last year, would become more common and more expensive, scientists say. Climate change slows the movement of hurricanes, making them wetter, more powerful and [more destructive](#).

2 — 2.6 degrees: Poor countries take a beating as productivity and food supplies fall

Given how much carbon humans have already emitted and existing plans for fossil fuel production, the world is likely to warm an additional 2 to 2.6 degrees by 2100 — twice the current trajectory — according to a report by Swiss Re. At a 2.6-degree rise, "The most impacted countries could lose five years' worth of today's economic output," researchers with the insurance giant wrote.

Some 99% of the world's corals would be wiped out by more than 2 degrees of warming, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate [Change](#) project. Entire island nations would disappear.

Fisheries' annual catch would drop by 3 million tons. More than a third of the world's population would see severe heat waves every five [years](#), the IPCC predicts.

More extremely hot days would also mean people wouldn't be able to work as long or as hard as they do now. Human bodies, much like crops, [tend to fail above a certain](#) temperature — a particularly threatening factor for so-called frontline workers in agriculture, transportation and manufacturing.

"Somewhere around 90-95 [degrees Fahrenheit], there is this drop off of people's working time. So people just stop working as long hours," Jina said. "When they're at work, people are also getting less productive, even if they're staying at work."

Today, for example, a weekday with temperatures above 86 degrees costs the average U.S. county \$20 per person, according to a recent preliminary [study](#).

3.2 — 4.5 degrees: Unprecedented flooding, seas rise by several feet

Flooding becomes more frequent and more extreme at a temperature increase of above 3 degrees beyond pre-industrial levels. With 4.5 degrees of warming, hundred-year floods become 10-year floods. Meanwhile, the associated sea-level rise would affect [290 million people](#) and wipe out one-fifth of global GDP.

"No country is immune to the effects of climate change, and no action is not an option," Swiss Re analysts wrote in an April report. Still, even in an extreme scenario, risks are uneven.

"Many major economies would lose roughly 10% of their GDP in about 30 years' time, while some in southeast Asia could lose roughly half of their GDP in that timeframe," the company found.

At the upper end of predicted global warming, drought becomes ever more severe. With 3.6 degrees of warming, nearly 3 billion people — 40% of the global population — would be exposed to drought, according to the University of East Anglia.

Such a temperature rise would also thaw most of the world's permafrost, leading to structural damage to buildings and roads as the ground underneath them literally shifts, according to the Arctic [Institute](#) — and likely forcing communities to relocate, a pattern already under way in [Alaska](#). (Because frozen permafrost contains a great deal of trapped methane, the release of this potent planet-warming gas due to thawing would likely supercharge even more extreme climate change.)

Not only poor countries would feel the pain. Coastal states in the U.S. are at risk of rising seas, with a moderate increase along coastlines costing South Carolina 1.1% of its state GDP every year. Louisiana would lose 1.5% and Florida 3%, according to the 2017 Science [study](#). Those losses would increase with more extreme rises in sea level.

The Biden administration is attuned to the possibility of climate upheaval. A White House [report](#) on climate released this month outlined a future in which "some regions lose industries, experiencing unemployment, reduced output, stranded assets, and loss of tax revenue, while others rapidly ramp up, promoting growth and raising prices in the face of competition for resources."

There's still time to change course

But the doom-spiral scenario of economic damage, in which cascading natural disasters deliver an even greater wallop, has a flip side: the clear economic benefit that comes from reducing carbon emissions and adapting infrastructure to a climate-changed future. The faster developed nations move to eliminate carbon pollution, the more costs can be avoided down the line.

"Every fraction of warming that can be prevented will mean lives saved and economic costs reduced," the White House wrote.

With a majority of Americans now coming around to the reality of climate change, this year's congressional actions and the COP26 summit in Glasgow, there is a chance for the U.S. to mitigate the kind of economic devastation climate collapse would bring.

"The eyes of history may see 2021 as a turning point for human-made climate change," James Hansen, the former NASA scientist who brought climate change to popular consciousness in the 1980s, [wrote](#) this week.

Investments in clean energy can still "shift the world to a pathway" toward net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, meaning no more carbon dioxide is emitted than can be removed from the atmosphere, Faith Birol, head of the International Energy Agency, recently [said](#).

Such a path is "narrow but still achievable if governments act now," he said.

Christopher Knittel, a professor of applied economics at MIT's Sloan School of Management told CBS MoneyWatch that new technologies may make that shift possible.

"All the technology costs that have fallen — solar, wind, batteries, if we can get nuclear costs to fall — then I see a real way out of this both domestically and internationally. There are exciting developments on the nuclear front."

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HEADLINE	10/28 Jobs workers want and don't want now
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/job-openings-hiring-covid-pandemic/
GIST	<p>American workers are snubbing low-wage jobs that can't be done remotely, new job search data shows.</p> <p>These sectors include childcare, food preparation and service, personal care and home health, and loading and stocking — with job searches plunging since prior to the pandemic, Indeed Hiring Lab said on Thursday. In the last 12 weeks, job searches for these fields have declined by between 4% and 8%, Indeed said.</p> <p>At the same time, job searches for jobs that pay higher wages and that can be done remotely have surged, Indeed found. These include fields such as information technology operations and help desk roles, as well as civil engineering. The findings suggest that many employers may continue struggling to attract new hires amid a constellation of challenges, such as a smaller U.S. labor force, ongoing concerns about COVID-19 and competition from better-paying industries.</p> <p>"Job seekers have the upper hand, and employers are trying to hire when job seekers have the opportunity to shop around a little bit," said AnnElizabeth Konkel, economist at Indeed Hiring Lab.</p> <p>To be sure, it's unlikely that restaurant workers are suddenly searching for civil engineering jobs, which require years of education and training. Konkel said her future research will examine where these low-wage workers are going.</p> <p>Other research has found that some workers in low-paying fields have changed careers, especially those workers who were furloughed early in the pandemic. About 1 in 7 restaurant workers have changed</p>

industries in the last year, primarily drawn to other sectors by a desire for higher pay and more stable work hours, Black Box/Snagajob [found](#) in an August report.

"Raising the wage"

Declining interest among job seekers in child care, restaurant and other low-wage roles signals that employers in those sectors are likely to continue facing a shortage of workers. Higher interest from job seekers is strongly correlated with better hourly wages — even more than an industry's share of jobs with remote work, Indeed found.

Some experts are calling the current shifts in the labor market the "[Great Resignation](#)," with research indicating that workers increasingly are leaving jobs that don't give them what they want, whether that's suitable pay, flexibility or career goals.

"If you are hiring in a sector where remote work isn't possible, really circle back to the idea of raising the wage if you are having trouble hiring," Konkel said. "That will be a key lever to get the workers you need."

Of course, that's not always possible for all employers, especially in industries where margins are thin, such as food service, and for small businesses. But employers can offer other enticements, Konkel noted, such as flexible schedules.

Women are among the group most impacted by these trends, with millions having dropped out of the labor force since the pandemic began, often due to child care issues. About 4 in 10 women say they are experiencing burnout, while one-third say their income isn't enough to pay for their family expenses, a new LinkedIn survey found.

The question is whether these trends will continue, especially as households run through savings they've accumulated during the pandemic, when federal stimulus aid bolstered finances.

"In the long term, it's tough to say if there has been a deeper shift in essentially the American psyche about what is important" with work, Konkel said. "If there is, then these hiring challenges may persist longer than what people are talking about right now."

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HEADLINE	10/28 Major Wall St bank mandates vaccination
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/citi-to-require-u-s-employees-be-vaccinated-against-covid-19/
GIST	<p>Citigroup will require all of its U.S. workers to be vaccinated against COVID-19 as a condition of employment, the nation's third-biggest bank said Thursday.</p> <p>Given the U.S. government is a large client, Citi has an "obligation" to comply with an executive order from the White House requiring that employees supporting government contracts be vaccinated, Sara Wechter, head of human resources at the financial giant, wrote on LinkedIn on Thursday.</p> <p>Further, "Having a vaccinated workforce enables us to ensure the health and safety of our colleagues as we return to the office in the U.S.," Wechter stated.</p> <p>Although other major financial institutions are requiring the shots for new hires or workers returning to the office, Citi is the first major lender to make inoculation against the coronavirus a condition of employment.</p> <p>Citi is requesting that its roughly 65,000 workers in the U.S. submit proof of vaccination by December 8, with a \$200 bonus offered to those who do, the company said. It has set January 14, 2022, as the last call for employees to comply. Citi runs more than 650 branches in half a dozen metropolitan areas across the country.</p>

	<p>President Biden last month ordered all workers supporting government contracts — along with anyone working in the same offices as those workers — to be fully vaccinated.</p> <p>According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, high vaccination rates reduce the spread of the coronavirus and helps stem new variants from emerging. Nearly 58% of the U.S. population is fully vaccinated against COVID-19, which has killed more than 740,000 Americans.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 NYC firefighters protest vaccine mandate
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/york-city-firefighters-protest-vaccine-mandate-mayors-residence/story?id=80840279
GIST	<p>New York City firefighters and other city workers protested outside the mayor's residence Thursday, as a COVID-19 vaccination deadline quickly approaches.</p> <p>Nearly all municipal employees, including police officers, sanitation workers and firefighters, have until 5 p.m. Friday to submit proof of receiving at least one dose of vaccine. Those who don't get vaccinated will be placed on unpaid leave, starting Monday, for at least 30 days, and their future employment will be resolved in negotiations with individual labor unions. Uniformed correction officers have until Dec. 1 to show proof of vaccination.</p> <p>The city's firefighters' unions organized Thursday's anti-vaccine mandate rally, which filled the entire block in front of Gracie Mansion, home to Mayor Bill de Blasio. Municipal employees, including FDNY union members, and others gathered, some holding signs that said "My body my choice" and "Coercion is not consent."</p> <p>Uniformed Firefighters Association of Greater New York President Andrew Ansbro previously told reporters that "a lot" of the union's members were "still struggling with making this decision." James McCarthy, president of the Uniformed Fire Officers Association, has also argued that the deadline, announced on Oct. 20, is "not enough time to make a retirement decision if you are going to retire from this job."</p> <p>Ansbro has warned of a "catastrophic manpower shortage" if some 3,500 firefighters who are currently unvaccinated are unable to report to work. The FDNY said Wednesday that 65% of its members were vaccinated.</p> <p>The mayor stood by his vaccine mandate Thursday, saying there are no plans to change the deadline.</p> <p>"My job is to keep people safe, my employees, and 8.8 million people, and until we defeat COVID, people are not safe," de Blasio said during a press briefing. "If we don't stop COVID, New Yorkers will die. We must, must stop COVID and the way to do that is vaccination. And that must include our public employees."</p> <p>On potential shortages in the city's fire, police and sanitation departments, de Blasio said that the agencies are "confident" about contingency plans, and that the city has anticipated that "a lot of the vaccinations would happen toward the end of the deadline."</p> <p>Overall, 86% of the city's 300,000-plus workforce is vaccinated, de Blasio said. That includes school and hospital employees who faced earlier deadlines.</p> <p>For outstanding city workers, that number drops to 76%, including 74% of police officers and 67% of sanitation workers, he said.</p> <p>"We are very confident those numbers are going to go up a lot," de Blasio said.</p> <p>Legal challenges to pause the city's vaccination mandate have so far been unsuccessful.</p>

HEADLINE	10/28 NHSTA: traffic deaths up 18% in 2021
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/us-road-deaths-spiked-18-20000-2021s-half-80843015
GIST	<p>DETROIT -- The number of U.S. traffic deaths in the first six months of 2021 hit 20,160, the highest first-half total since 2006, the government reported Thursday, a sign of growing reckless driving during the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>The estimated number was 18.4% higher than the first half of last year, prompting Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg to call the increase an unacceptable crisis.</p> <p>That percentage increase was the biggest six-month increase since the department began recording fatal crash data since 1975.</p> <p>The department, which includes the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, announced that it will develop a national strategy for steps to save lives on the roads.</p> <p>““We cannot and should not accept these fatalities as simply a part of everyday life in America,” Buttigieg said in a statement Thursday. “No one will accomplish this alone. It will take all levels of government, industries, advocates, engineers and communities across the country working together toward the day when family members no longer have to say good-bye to loved ones because of a traffic crash.”</p> <p>NHTSA also said that behavioral research from March through June showed that speeding and traveling without a seat belt remain higher than before the coronavirus pandemic. The agency has pointed to increasing road deaths, a trend for the last two years, on more reckless behavior on the roads.</p> <p>Consumer groups have been urging the agency to move more quickly to boost road safety, pointing to increasing accidents and a yearslong backlog in implementing safety rules. An Associated Press review earlier this month of rule-making by NHTSA found at least 13 auto-safety rules past due, including a rear seat belt reminder requirement passed by Congress in 2012 that was to be implemented by 2015.</p> <p>“This public safety crisis requires decisive action by the U.S. Department of Transportation, where progress on requirements and performance standards for lifesaving vehicle safety technology has been overdue for far too long,” said Cathy Chase, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, in a statement Thursday. “Motorists and road users are being killed needlessly while proven solutions are deferred, delayed or dormant.”</p> <p>The latest spike in fatalities came as people drove more as pandemic shutdowns eased. Preliminary data from the Federal Highway Administration show that vehicle miles traveled in the first six months of the year rose by 173.1 billion miles, around a 13% increase from last year.</p> <p>The death rate for the first half of this year rose to 1.34 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. It's up from 1.28 deaths per 100 million miles in the first half of 2020, the agency said.</p> <p>NHTSA Deputy Administrator Steven Cliff, urged drivers to slow down, wear seat belts, drive sober and avoid distractions. President Joe Biden last week nominated Cliff, a former California environmental regulator, to run the agency full-time.</p> <p>“All of us must work together to stop aggressive, dangerous driving,” Cliff said.</p> <p>The Transportation Department said its strategy would follow a “safe system approach” to road safety that identifies safety action for drivers, roads, vehicles, speeds and post-crash medical care. The strategy will be released in January, the department said. It also has pointed to plans to start moving on some of the proposed safety regulations, although the agency has often missed past deadlines, even those promised in federal court.</p>

HEADLINE	10/28 Germany warns far-right on border patrols
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/german-security-officials-warn-border-patrols-80835960
GIST	<p>BERLIN -- German security officials are warning far-right groups not to carry out vigilante patrols along the country's eastern border with Poland, amid a rise in the number of migrants crossing the frontier illegally in recent weeks.</p> <p>Extremist groups including the far-right “Third Way” and “Free Saxons” party have been using social media to recruit people for their patrols.</p> <p>“The state has the monopoly on the legitimate use of force,” said the head of the domestic intelligence agency in Saxony state, Dirk-Martin Christian.</p> <p>He said the move echoes tactics used by right-wing extremists during the refugee influx in 2015 and 2016, as well as recent anti-lockdown protests.</p> <p>German authorities have reported an uptick in the number of people illegally entering the country through Poland in recent weeks. On some days, officers have picked up several hundred people a day.</p> <p>Many of those stopped are Iraqi and Syrians who have flown to Belarus and then managed to cross illegally into Poland, from where they made their way to Germany in the hope of applying for asylum.</p> <p>Jens Schobranski, a spokesman for Germany's federal police, said vigilante patrols are hampering officers from doing their work.</p> <p>“Border surveillance is the job of the state and we are performing that task,” he told The Associated Press.</p> <p>“These stunts by people with right-wing attitudes are absolutely unacceptable and seem intended to undermine the state's monopoly of the use of force,” Schobranski added. “We're taking decisive steps against it.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Airstrike in Ethiopia's Tigray kills 10
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/airstrike-ethiopias-tigray-capital-kids-dead-80831656
GIST	<p>NAIROBI, Kenya -- Children were among 10 people killed when an Ethiopian military airstrike hit the capital of the country's Tigray region on Thursday, a doctor and a Tigray spokesman said. It was the deadliest of a new round of airstrikes that began last week as the year-long war intensifies.</p> <p>International calls for a cease-fire have been in vain as Ethiopian and allied forces battle the Tigray forces who long dominated the national government before being sidelined by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Thousands of people have been killed in Africa's second most populous country, and the world's worst hunger crisis in a decade has begun.</p> <p>Government spokesman Legesse Tulu told The Associated Press the new airstrike targeted a site in Mekele city used by Tigray forces to make and repair weapons. He said the site forms part of a compound belonging to Mefsin Industrial Engineering, which was also hit last week.</p> <p>Tigray spokesman Nahusenay Belay denied that the airstrike hit a military target and said it struck a “civilian residence.” Three children were among the dead, he said. Hayelom Kebede, former director of Tigray's flagship Ayder Referral Hospital, said 10 people were killed and 21 injured, and he expected the toll to rise.</p> <p>Photos from the scene appeared to show rescuers pulling bodies from debris.</p>

	<p>Ethiopia's government has asserted that the latest airstrikes have been confined to military targets, but Tigray forces have asserted that civilian facilities including factories and a clinic have been targeted instead, with at least three children among those killed.</p> <p>Meanwhile, fighting continues in Ethiopia's neighboring Amhara region after Abiy's government launched a ground offensive there earlier this month against the Tigray forces, who say they are trying to pressure the government to lift a blockade on the Tigray region.</p> <p>Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced in recent weeks amid the new fighting as the humanitarian crisis grows.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 World leaders gather for climate talks
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/stake-world-gathers-climate-talks-80850201
GIST	<p>More than one world leader says humanity's future, even survival, hangs in the balance when international officials meet in Scotland to try to accelerate efforts to curb climate change. Temperatures, tempers and hyperbole have all ratcheted up ahead of the United Nations summit.</p> <p>And the risk of failure looms large for all participants at the 26th U.N. Climate Change Conference, known as COP26.</p> <p>Six years ago, nearly 200 countries agreed to individualized plans to fight global warming in the historic 2015 Paris climate agreement. Now leaders will converge in Glasgow for two weeks starting Sunday to take the next step dictated by that pact: Do more and do it faster.</p> <p>It's not easy. Except for a slight drop because of the pandemic, carbon pollution from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas is increasing, not falling.</p> <p>Between now and 2030, the world will spew up to 28 billion metric tons (31 billion U.S. tons) of greenhouse gases beyond the amount that would keep the planet at or below the most stringent limit set in Paris, the United Nations calculated this week.</p> <p>"Everything is at stake if the leaders do not take climate action," young Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate said. "We cannot eat coal. We cannot drink oil, and we cannot breathe so-called natural gas."</p> <p>Her words were echoed by a man tasked with steering one of the world's richest economic blocs through the climate transition.</p> <p>"We are fighting for the survival of humanity," European Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans said. "Climate change and the threatening ecocide are the biggest threats humanity faces."</p> <p>Climate change is fueling heat waves, flooding, drought and nastier tropical cyclones. Extreme weather also costs the globe about \$320 billion a year in economic losses, according to risk modeling firm AIR Worldwide. And people die.</p> <p>"The unhealthy choices that are killing our planet are killing our people as well," said Dr. Maria Neira, director of public health and environment at the World Health Organization.</p> <p>Humanity and the Earth won't quite go off a cliff because of global warming, scientists say. But what happens in Glasgow will either steer the world away from the most catastrophic scenarios or send it careening down a dirt road with tight curves and peril at every turn. It's a situation where degrees, even tenths of a degree, translate into added risk.</p> <p>"We are still on track for climate catastrophe," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said Tuesday, even after some countries' recent emission pledges.</p>

For months, United Nations officials have touted three concrete goals for these negotiations to succeed:

- Countries must promise to reduce carbon emissions by 45% by 2030 compared with 2010.
- Rich countries should contribute \$100 billion a year in aid to poor countries.
- Half of that amount must be aimed at adapting to climate change's worst effects.

World leaders have recently softened those targets a bit, and they say the goals may not quite be finished by mid-November, when negotiations end. U.S. Climate Envoy John Kerry told The Associated Press: "There will be a gap" on emission targets.

Under the Paris pact, nations must revisit their previous pledges to curb carbon pollution every five years and then announce plans to cut even more and do it faster. Delayed a year by the pandemic, this year's meeting is the first to include the required ratcheting up of ambitions.

The hope is that world leaders will cajole each other into doing more, while ensuring that poorer nations struggling to tackle climate change get the financial support they need.

The headline goal set in Paris was to limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) since preindustrial times. The world has already warmed 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit) since then.

Former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said this month that the 1.5-degree mark "is the threshold for our survival, humanity, our planet Earth."

But every analysis of current climate-change pledges shows that they are not nearly enough to stop warming at that point but will instead lead to at least another degree or a degree and a half Celsius of warming (about 2 to 3 degrees Fahrenheit).

All five emissions scenarios studied in a massive UN scientific assessment in August suggest that the world will cross that 1.5-degree-Celsius threshold in the 2030s, though several researchers told the AP that it is still technically possible to stay within that limit or at least temporarily go over it and come back down.

Small island nations and other poor, vulnerable communities said in 2015 that 2 degrees would wipe them out, and insisted on the 1.5-degree threshold.

"Our way of life is at stake," said Tina Stege, the climate envoy for the Marshall Islands. "Our ability to provide our children with a safe and secure future is at stake. Atoll nations like the Marshall Islands do not have higher ground to retreat to."

In Glasgow, divisions between nations are big, and trust is a problem, say several United Nations officials and outside analysts.

Rich countries like the United States and European nations developed carbon-belching energy and caused most of the problem historically, but now they ask poor nations to cut or eliminate the use of fossil fuels. In return, they've promised \$100 billion a year by 2020 to help developing countries switch to clean energy.

So far, the funding has fallen far short of that amount.

"Failure to fulfill this pledge is a major source of the erosion of trust between developed and developing nations," Guterres said.

The key to success may lie in the middle, with major emerging economies.

Three days before the meeting starts, China, the world's largest carbon emitter, submitted a new national target that is only marginally stronger than what was previously proposed.

China is so important that if every other nation cuts back in line with the 45% global emission reduction and China doesn't, the world's total will drop only by 30%, according to Claire Fyson, a top analyst at Climate Action Tracker, a group of scientists that monitor and analyze emission pledges.

In the end, every country, will be asked to do more in Glasgow, said United Nations Environment Programme Director Inger Andersen. But much of the effort, she said, comes back to China and the U.S.

"We need these two powers to put aside whatever else and to show true climate leadership because this is what it will take," Andersen told the AP.

But realistically, she added, leaders in Glasgow, will take anything "in terms of real, meaningful commitments that are backed by action — action that starts in 2022."

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HEADLINE	10/28 Compensate families separated at border?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/us-talks-compensate-families-separated-border-80847461
GIST	<p>SAN DIEGO -- The U.S. Justice Department is in talks to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to each child and parent who was separated under a Trump-era practice of splitting families at the border, a person familiar with discussions to settle lawsuits said Thursday.</p> <p>The Wall Street Journal first reported that the government was considering payments around \$450,000 to each person affected. A person familiar with the talks told The Associated Press that figure was under consideration but changed, though not dramatically. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the discussions are private.</p> <p>The discussions continue, and there is no guarantee the two sides will strike agreement.</p> <p>About 5,500 children were split from their parents under President Donald Trump's "zero tolerance" policy, under which parents were separated from their children to face criminal prosecution for crossing the border illegally, according to court filings in a federal case in San Diego. Inadequate tracking systems caused many to be apart for an extended time. The payments are intended to compensate for the psychological trauma.</p> <p>Attorneys for the families are also seeking permanent legal status in the United States for those separated under the practice, which a judge halted in June 2018, six days after Trump stopped it amid an international backlash.</p> <p>The Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday night.</p> <p>The settlement talks involve several law firms. The American Civil Liberties Union is representing parents in the San Diego case.</p> <p>The National Immigration Litigation Alliance represents five mothers and their children who were separated for more than two months, including four children who were sent to holding facilities in New York. A federal judge in Arizona denied the government's bid to dismiss the case last year.</p> <p>"No amount of money can compensate for the amount of pain and suffering these parents and children endured under this unconscionable and unprecedented policy," said Trina Realmuto, executive director of the National Immigration Litigation Alliance.</p>

A Justice Department inspector general's report in January said a "single-minded focus on increasing immigration prosecutions came at the expense of careful and appropriate consideration of the impact of family unit prosecutions and child separations."

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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	10/28 Microsoft: billions of passwords hacked
SOURCE	https://www.the-sun.com/tech/3950378/microsoft-billions-passwords-hacked-check-now/
GIST	<p>MICROSOFT has issued a stark warning to those who reuse their passwords across multiple online accounts.</p> <p>In a blog post this week, the US tech titan said it had identified an uptick in the use of "password spray" attacks over the past 12 months.</p> <p>They involve hackers gathering a list of usernames and passwords leaked online and plugging them in to various websites.</p> <p>Cyber crooks hope to eventually stumble across a working combination that gives them access to someone's email or social media accounts.</p> <p>From there, they can attempt to break into more sensitive accounts such as your bank or iCloud.</p> <p>The attacks were identified by Microsoft's Detection and Response Team (DART), which is dedicated to identifying the latest cyber attack methods.</p> <p>"This threat is a moving target with techniques and tools always changing," researchers wrote on Tuesday. "They are different from brute-force attacks, which involve attackers ... attempting to attack a small number of user accounts."</p> <p>The researchers identified two commonly used kinds of password sprays.</p> <p>One involves matching known usernames to commonly used passwords, such as "password" or "123456". The hope is that they will eventually "guess" the correct combination for as many users as possible.</p> <p>The second technique highlighted by Microsoft involves usernames and passwords that have been leaked online by crooks in the past.</p> <p>The 2012 LinkedIn hack, for instance, saw the usernames and passwords of 6.5million users stolen by cyber crooks and sold online.</p> <p>Google estimates that over 4billion username and password combinations have leaked in recent years.</p> <p>Hackers can plug these combinations into other websites in the hope that you've reused them across multiple online accounts.</p> <p>Microsoft said: "Once attackers have gained the credentials to an account, they can access any sensitive resources that users can access and have the malicious activity appear as normal.</p> <p>"This creates a repeating cycle attack pattern, where one compromised account can lead to access to resources where additional credentials can be harvested, and thus even further resource access."</p> <p>How to check if your passwords are safe</p>

The free Password Checkup software can be loaded onto Google Chrome and lets you know if your account details have been compromised in a cyber attack or data breach.

Once installed, the Chrome extension runs in the background of your browser and checks any login details you used.

If your password or username matches a Google database of more than 4 billion compromised credentials, the software will flag them.

An alert that pops up on your screen reads: "Password Checkup detected that your password for [website] is no longer safe due to a data breach. You should change your password now."

If a new data breach occurs, the tool will let you if any of your passwords were compromised the next time you login to Chrome.

It gives you any exposed accounts in a small list that you can click through to change your passwords.

All information is encrypted, and Google says it has no way of seeing your data.

"We built Password Checkup so that no one, including Google, can learn your account details," Google said.

"Password Checkup was built with privacy in mind. It never reports any identifying information about your accounts, passwords or device."

You can download Password Checkup from the Chrome webstore by [clicking here](#).

Alternatively, popular web-tool Have I Been Pwned also lets you check if you've ever been hacked.

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HEADLINE	10/28 WA launches Covid vaccine verification tool
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/washington-state-quietly-launches-covid-vaccine-verification-tool/
GIST	<p>Washington state this week quietly launched a new online tool that shows proof of a COVID-19 vaccination, taking a step toward improving its verification systems as it prepares to require full vaccination or a recent negative test at all large indoor and outdoor venues on Nov. 15.</p> <p>The tool, WA Verify, is fairly straightforward: Fill out your name, date of birth, contact information and a four-digit PIN number (needed to securely access digital records, the website says), and the system will text you a link to get a scannable QR code and digital copy of your COVID-19 vaccination records.</p> <p>The electronic record is drawn from the data stored in the state's immunization registry, according to WA Verify's FAQ page. Once you receive WA Verify's QR code, you can take a screenshot and present it in restaurants, bars or other venues that require proof of immunization.</p> <p>If you have an iPhone, you can save the QR code to the Apple Health app (on the newest operating system). If you have an Android phone, you can save the code to Google Pay.</p> <p>To access multiple vaccination records associated with a single phone number or email address, the site instructs you to enter each digital verification record request separately.</p> <p>The new system only provides copies of state vaccine records, so residents who received immunizations from a federal agency — such as the Department of Defense, Indian Health Services or Veterans Affairs — must contact that agency for help, the site says.</p>

WA Verify was developed by the state Department of Health's Office of Innovation, a DOH spokesperson said Thursday. The department will announce an official launch "in the near future," he said.

"We want this to be something easy and accessible for Washingtonians, and we expect to have more to share about this very soon," Lacy Fehrenbach, DOH's deputy secretary for COVID-19 response, said during a news conference Thursday.

The state has previously used online tools like [MyIR](#) and [MyIR Mobile](#) to help Washingtonians provide digital proofs of vaccination, but residents have reported on-and-off issues and delays with the sites, particularly in June [when the system was inundated with requests to enter the state's vaccine lottery](#).

The state's new tool comes as King County's vaccination verification requirement goes into effect this week, which has gotten mixed reviews from restaurant and bar owners.

According to the mandate, which took effect Monday, patrons must show proof of vaccination or a recent negative test to dine inside of bars and restaurants, to work out in gyms, and to enjoy indoor entertainment venues such as theaters and museums in King County.

The new rule also applies to conferences and conventions, and any large outdoor gatherings with more than 500 people — though children under age 12, who aren't yet eligible for a vaccine, are exempt.

Gov. Jay Inslee said during the Thursday news conference that while the state has decided not to implement the vaccine verification requirement at restaurants and bars statewide at this time, his office is "looking at the experience of King County to see if it's positive and we'll continue to monitor that situation."

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HEADLINE	10/28 China PLA procuring AI for combat
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/report-chinas-pla-has-made-extraordinary-progress-in-procuring-ai-for-combat/
GIST	<p>China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) appears to be spending about the same as the U.S. military on artificial intelligence, or AI, and has made 'extraordinary progress' in procuring AI systems for combat and support operations, according to a new report.</p> <p>The Center for Security and Emerging Technology, (CSET) at Georgetown University went through tens of thousands of PLA procurement records and lays out what it discovered in a new report called <i>Harnessed Lightning: How the Chinese Military is Adopting Artificial Intelligence</i>. Their conclusion: China is moving swiftly to make AI an integral part of its military modernization efforts.</p> <p>"Chinese leaders view AI as the key to transforming the PLA into a 'world-class,' globally competitive military force," the authors of the report wrote. "The PLA hopes to use AI to generate asymmetric advantages vis-a-vis the United States, which it regards as a 'strong enemy,' but also a role model for AI-development."</p> <p>The researchers analyzed 343 AI-related contracts awarded by PLA units and state-owned defense companies to get a sense of the Chinese military's AI strategy. Among other things, an analysis of their spending priorities, the report said, suggests the PLA is particularly focused on the development of autonomous vehicles, and using AI and machine learning to sharpen intelligence analysis, information warfare, and target recognition.</p> <p>Procurement records, even though they are public, provide strong clues as to strategy and intention because militaries typically don't have unlimited resources, so tracking where leaders decide to spend their money can be both meaningful and instructive.</p> <p>With that in mind, CSET went through more than 66,000 procurement records — everything from requests for proposals to awarded contracts — published between March 30 and December 1, 2020.</p>

Among the things they discovered: as a general matter, PLA units don't do their own buying. Instead, it appears that state-owned enterprises like the Aviation Industry Corporation of China, and China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp and their subsidiaries approve most of the AI purchases.

The study found that the PLA is adopting AI in seven discrete areas:

- intelligent and autonomous vehicles (particularly airborne and underwater vehicles)
- predictive maintenance and logistics
- intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR)
- information and electronic warfare
- simulation and training
- command and control
- automated target recognition

There were about 120 awarded contracts for autonomous vehicles compared with just over 60 for ISR, the report said.

The Chinese seem particularly interested in swarms of drones, it said. Last year, China awarded contracts to develop air-launched drone clusters and bought much of the technology necessary to make them work — like self-organizing UAV communications systems and collision avoidance sensors. (These [drone swarms first came into public consciousness](#) during the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in South Korea in 2018 when lighted drones flew in formation like obedient constellations across the night sky.)

While the exact amount PLA spending on AI is hard to pinpoint (since many of their AI purchases are likely classified), the CSET researchers reckon the Chinese military is spending between \$1.6 billion and \$2.7 billion on AI-related technologies a year, which would put its AI spending on par with that of the U.S. military.

Even the high end of that range is a far cry from the number that has been bandied around Washington, D.C. for years. The Chinese government had been projected to spend some \$70 billion on AI by 2020, just a few years ago. [The figure came from a speech by a top U.S. Air Force general in 2018](#), but the numbers have never been substantiated. Instead, what that speech ended up doing is stoke concerns that the U.S. is lagging in the AI arms race with China.

[Earlier this year](#), the *Record* reported on a CSET paper that said at least six major Chinese universities linked to government hacking groups were studying the intersection of cybersecurity and machine learning. The paper, titled “Academics, AI, and APTs,” warned that the research conducted in these Chinese universities today could find their way into the techniques used by Chinese state-sponsored hackers (APTs).

The six universities named in earlier report include Hainan University (海南大学), Southeast University (东南大学), Shanghai Jiao Tong University (上海交通大学), Xidian University (西安电子科技大学), Zhejiang University (浙江大学), and the Harbin Institute of Technology (哈尔滨工业大学).

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HEADLINE	10/28 Cyber threats: all sectors now prey
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/cyber-threats-targeting-all-sectors/175873/
GIST	<p>Ransomware doesn't discriminate – today, every sector faces risks.</p> <p>But we are seeing changes in which sectors are being targeted the most. For instance, while healthcare and education have long been considered the most heavily attacked, that's shifting. In the latest FortiGuard Labs Global Threat Report, researchers found that the prevalence of ransomware in those two sectors was lower than managed security service providers, the automotive and manufacturing sectors, telecommunications, and government.</p>

The common denominator is that the more an industry becomes digitized, the more opportunity there is for cybercriminals. Let's look at some of the rising threats in these industries, what that means and what needs to happen next.

Bad Actors Shift to Industrialized Sectors

As we saw with the attacks on [Colonial Pipeline](#) and [JBS Foods](#), industrialized sectors aren't immune to cyberattacks. In fact, they're becoming increasingly popular with bad actors. For example, manufacturing became a bigger target in the first half of 2021, with FortiGuard Labs researchers finding that ransomware was detected in 32.5 percent of these companies. That's compared with just 12.1 percent in the first half of 2020 ([PDF](#)).

Automotive was another sector that saw an increase in ransomware activity: 33.6 percent in 2021, compared with just 10.8 percent in the first half of 2020 – a significant jump. And what's more, a recent report ([PDF](#)) from a cybersecurity ratings firm examined how prepared the automotive industry is and found that about half of the top 100 companies are “highly susceptible” to a ransomware attack.

Agriculture also saw a rise in these attacks. This may seem an improbable target to some, but if you consider how tech-dependent agriculture has become, these findings make sense. A modern farm or other type of agricultural facility can have a huge number of internet-of-things (IoT) devices deployed, each with its own connections and exposures.

In the first half of 2021, ransomware was detected in 28 percent of agriculture organizations that researchers observed. That's up from 9.1 percent in the first half of 2020. Researchers also observed agriculture to be among the sectors attracting more exploit attention.

The Current Threat Landscape

The past year and a half has been one of the busiest eras for cybercriminals due to the pandemic's major shift in the cyber threat landscape. The sudden shift to remote work caught many off guard and left their networks susceptible to cybercrime. Now, as work models shift once again in many countries, it is crucial to reconsider how these threats will affect the transition and how organizations can secure their networks.

At this time last year, bad actors had reassigned their resources from enterprise infrastructure devices to home networks and consumer-grade products. Now, though, they are aggressively targeting both. Top intrusion prevention system (IPS) detections, for example, show that while cybercriminals aggressively target small business and consumer-grade technologies to exploit remote workers, they have also returned to targeting corporate networks and content management and application development platforms.

The ransom-as-a-service (RaaS) model is also gaining traction, wherein criminals basically take on the mindset of a defender, by ransoming their “consulting services” and revealing to organizations how they gained access to their networks. It's an interesting change in their mindset, and it's a proven model that makes money for the ransomware operators and their affiliates. In some cases, campaigns make millions of dollars.

A Strategy for Security

While law enforcement and government agencies have taken actions against cybercrime in the past, the first half of 2021 could be transformative with respect to momentum for the future. They are working with threat intelligence organizations, industry vendors and other global partnership organizations to combine resources and real-time threat intelligence to take direct action against attackers.

Even so, automated threat detection and AI remain pivotal so organizations can fight attacks in real time and mitigate attacks at speed and scale across all edges. In addition, cybersecurity user awareness training remains as important as ever, with everyone being a target for cyberattacks. Everyone needs regular training on best practices to keep employees and the organization secure.

Strengthen the Kill Chain

Bad actors aren't going to stop their nefarious activities, and the more any sector becomes digitized, the more opportunity there is for them. This means organizations across sectors must maintain a strong security posture. Partnership; training; and AI-powered prevention, detection and response are vital to defend against the threat.

Countering cyber adversaries requires ongoing cybersecurity awareness training and AI-powered prevention, detection and response technologies. For comprehensive security, zero-trust access and security-driven approaches are essential. Most importantly, security devices must be integrated across endpoints, networks and the cloud.

It's time for everyone to recognize their essential role in strengthening the kill chain. To disrupt cybercriminal supply chains, collaboration must be a priority. Forming partnerships and sharing data enable more effective responses and better predict future techniques to thwart attackers' efforts.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Report: remote work strains IT teams
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/half-home-workers-buy-insecure-kit/
GIST	<p>Incidents of shadow IT have snowballed during the pandemic as remote workers bought devices without vetting from the IT department, a new report from HP has warned.</p> <p>The tech giant's Out of Sight and Out of Mind report is based on a global survey of 1100 IT decision-makers and a separate poll of more than 8400 home workers in the US, the UK, Mexico, Germany, Australia, Canada, and Japan.</p> <p>Nearly half (45%) said they'd bought IT equipment such as printers or PCs to support home working over the past year.</p> <p>However, 68% said security wasn't as big a consideration as other factors like price or functionality when purchasing. Even worse, 43% didn't have their new laptop or PC checked or installed by IT, and 50% said the same of their new printer.</p> <p>IT is also being bypassed when it comes to reporting incidents, the study found. Even though three-quarters (74%) of IT teams claimed to have seen a rise in the number of employees opening malicious phishing links or attachments in the past year, most (70%) home workers who clicked said they didn't report it.</p> <p>That will hurt IT's attempts to understand the level of risk the business faces and where it needs to tweak policy or direct security resources.</p> <p>The combined impact of these shadow IT challenges is already pronounced: 79% of IT leaders reported that rebuild rates for machines increased during the pandemic. This indicates PCs and laptops have been compromised by malware.</p> <p>It's also having an impact on IT teams themselves. Two-thirds of IT leaders said that patching endpoint devices is more time-consuming and challenging than pre-pandemic. As a result, they estimated the cost of IT support concerning security has risen by 52% in the past 12 months.</p> <p>Some 83% claimed home worker security problems had put more strain on the IT team, and over three-quarters (77%) are worried staff will burnout as a result.</p> <p>"As IT continues to grow in complexity, security support is becoming unmanageable. For hybrid working to be a success, IT security teams need to be freed from spending hours provisioning and fielding user access requests so they can focus on tasks that add value," argued HP's global head of security for personal systems, Ian Pratt.</p>

	“We need a new security architecture that not only protects against known and unknown threats, but that helps to reduce the burden to liberate cybersecurity teams and users alike. By applying the principles of zero trust, organizations can design resilient defenses to keep the business safe and recover quickly in the event of a compromise.”
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HEADLINE	10/28 Cops receive stalkerware training
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cops-receive-stalkerware-training/
GIST	<p>Members of the Coalition Against Stalkerware are helping law enforcement agencies to investigate cases involving digital stalking.</p> <p>The Coalition was created in 2019 by ten founding partners: Avira, Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (WWP EN), G DATA Cyber Defense, Kaspersky, Malwarebytes, the United States–based National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV), NortonLifeLock, Operation Safe Escape, and WEISSER RING.</p> <p>Earlier this week, Coalition members NNEDV and Kaspersky joined forces with INTERPOL and Australia's national umbrella organization for domestic violence services, Wesnet, to arrange two online training sessions addressing issues of digital stalking and domestic violence.</p> <p>Kaspersky said that the goal of the online training, which involved more than 210 participants, was "to enhance capacity building within law enforcement agencies, support victims requesting assistance, and hold perpetrators to account."</p> <p>According to Kaspersky's <i>State of Stalkerware 2020</i> report, 53,870 mobile users worldwide were affected by stalkerware in 2020. The commercially available software invades victims' privacy by providing personal data such as device location, browser history, text messages, social media chats, photos and more to their stalker.</p> <p>Wesnet chief executive officer Karen Bentley said cyber-stalking was among the most common forms of abuse to co-occur with domestic and family violence, and was associated with an increased likelihood of lethal and near-lethal harm.</p> <p>“Digital stalking is an issue known to the global law enforcement community, but there is a need to enhance capabilities around how to conduct investigations on stalkerware,” said Pei Ling Lee, acting assistant director of cyber strategy and capabilities development at INTERPOL. “The software hides itself, and investigations need to be undertaken carefully for the safety of the victims.”</p> <p>In the online training sessions, law enforcement officers learned about stalkerware and its installation methods along with different ways to detect it without compromising the safety of a victim. They were also introduced to the free anti-stalkerware scanning app TinyCheck.</p> <p>Earlier this month, the Coalition Against Stalkerware received the J.D. Falk Award for its work raising awareness, increasing detection, and combating the spread of malware used for stalking and intimate partner abuse.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Data breach at University of Colorado
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/data-breach-at-university-of-1/
GIST	<p>An American university is notifying thousands of former and current students that their personal information may have been compromised during a recent data breach.</p> <p>In a security notice issued October 25, the University of Colorado Boulder (CU Boulder) attributed the breach to an unpatched vulnerability in software provided by a third-party vendor, Atlassian Corporation Plc.</p>

[Atlassian](#) is an Australian software company headquartered in Sydney that develops products for software developers, project managers and other software development teams.

CU Boulder said that the flaw "impacted a program used mostly by the Office of Information Technology (OIT) to share resources, such as support and procedural documents, configuration files and collaborative documents."

Some files stored in the impacted program contained personally identifiable information (PII) for current and former CU Boulder students. Included in that information were names, student ID numbers, addresses, dates of birth, phone numbers, and genders.

No Social Security numbers or financial information was exposed during the security incident.

"An analysis by the Office of Information Security revealed some data stored in the program was accessed by an attacker," said CU Boulder.

Atlassian released a patch for the flaw on August 25. Since the incident, OIT has upgraded the software to the latest version, which is not susceptible to the vulnerability that was exploited by the attacker.

CU Boulder said that the Office was testing the new version and preparing to implement it when the intrusion occurred.

The university said that most of the roughly 30,000 individuals whose data may have been compromised in the incident are no longer affiliated with CU Boulder as a student or employee. Victims are being notified by the university via email.

Dan Jones, associate vice chancellor for integrity, safety and compliance at the university, said campus officials did not know who was behind the cyber-attack.

"Monitoring services will be made available at no cost for individuals whose confidentiality may have been compromised," said CU Boulder.

The university said that the data breach was not connected to the cyber-attack on CU's Accellion service earlier this year, which compromised information in 310,000 files, including student data and medical information.

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HEADLINE	10/28 New Android malware can root devices
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/new-abstractemu-malware-roots-android-devices-evades-detection/
GIST	<p>New Android malware can root infected devices to take complete control and silently tweak system settings, as well as evade detection using code abstraction and anti-emulation checks.</p> <p>The malware, dubbed AbstractEmu by security researchers at the Lookout Threat Labs who found it, was bundled with 19 utility apps distributed via Google Play and third-party app stores (including the Amazon Appstore, the Samsung Galaxy Store, Aptoide, and APKPure).</p> <p>Apps bundling the malware included password managers and tools like data savers and app launchers, all of them providing the functionality they promised to avoid raising suspicions.</p> <p>The malicious apps were removed from the Google Play Store after Lookout reported their discovery. However, the other app stores are likely still distributing them.</p>

Lite Launcher, an app launcher and one of the apps used to deliver the AbstractEmu malware on unsuspecting Android users' devices, had over 10,000 downloads when taken down from Google Play.

"AbstractEmu does not have any sophisticated zero-click remote exploit functionality used in advanced APT-style threats, it is activated simply by the user having opened the app," the Lookout researchers [said](#).

"As the malware is disguised as functional apps, most users will likely interact with them shortly after downloading."

Once installed, AbstractEmu will begin harvesting and sending system information to its command-and-control (C2) server while the malware waits for further commands.

To root Android devices it infects, AbstractEmu has multiple tools at its disposal in the form of exploits targeting several vulnerabilities, including [CVE-2020-0041](#), a bug never exploited in the wild by Android apps before this.

The malware also uses a [CVE-2020-0069](#) exploit to abuse a vulnerability found in MediaTek chips used by dozens of smartphone manufacturers that have collectively sold millions of devices.

The threat actors behind AbstractEmu also have enough skills and tech know-how to add support for more targets to publicly available code for [CVE-2019-2215](#) and CVE-2020-0041 exploits.

"This is a significant discovery because widely-distributed malware with root capabilities have become rare over the past five years," the Lookout researchers [said](#).

"By using the rooting process to gain privileged access to the Android operating system, the threat actor can silently grant themselves dangerous permissions or install additional malware — steps that would normally require user interaction."

AbstractEmu will wait for commands from its C2 server, which can instruct it to harvest and exfiltrate files based on how new they are or match a given pattern, root infected devices, or install new apps

Additional actions AbstractEmu can perform after rooting an infected device range from monitoring notifications, capturing screenshots, and recording the screen to locking the device and even resetting the device password.

"Elevated privileges also give the malware access to other apps' sensitive data, something not possible under normal circumstances," the researchers added.

Indicator of compromise and additional technical information, including anti-emulation and device inspection techniques, can be found in [the Lookout report](#).

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HEADLINE	10/28 Japan: malicious spyware spreading
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/android-spyware-spreading-as-antivirus-software-in-japan/
GIST	<p>A new variant of the Android info-stealer called FakeCop has been spotted by Japanese security researchers, who warn that the distribution of the malicious APK is picking up pace.</p> <p>First spotted by Japanese security researcher Yusuke Osumi last week, the malware is being distributed in phishing campaigns impersonating KDDI.</p> <p>Furthermore, the malware is only detected by 22 out of 62 AV engines on VirusTotal, showing a concerted effort by the threat actor to remain hidden.</p> <p>Masked as a popular security tool</p>

In a new report by cybersecurity firm Cyble, researchers have dubbed the malware 'FakeCop' and state it is masquerading as 'Anshin Security,' a popular antivirus product in Japan.

After analyzing the malware, the researchers state that the new spyware variant has the following capabilities:

- Collect SMSs, contacts, accounts information, and apps list
- Modify or delete SMSs in the device database
- Collect device hardware information (IMEI)
- Send SMSs without the user's knowledge

When users are met with such requests by AV software, they are more likely to grant them because security software commonly needs higher privileges to scan and remove detected threats.

Attempts to evade detection

The malware authors are also using a custom packer to hide the actual behavior of their app while also thwarting static detection.

The malicious code is Bitwise XOR encrypted and stored inside a file in the assets folder, and it can only be unpacked if invoked by a specific app subclass.

Additionally, FakeCop actively scans the device app list, and if any antivirus apps are found, it pushes a notification to the user asking them to uninstall them.

The hardcoded AV solutions that malware will prompt users to remove include Anshin Security, McAfee Security, and the Docomo Anshin Scan.

As for how FakeCop reaches the victims, Cyble's OSINT research revealed two channels of distribution, one via SMS with malicious links and one relying on phishing emails.

The 'duckdns.org' free dynamic DNS used as the delivery mechanism has been [previously used](#) for distributing Medusa and Flubot, so it's possible that the current campaign ties to the same operators.

As a general rule, avoid clicking on URL links that arrive via unsolicited SMS and email, and refrain from installing APK files from outside the Google Play Store.

Additionally, periodically check and confirm that Google Play Protect is active on your device, and always scrutinize permission requests when installing a new app.

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HEADLINE	10/28 TrickBot malware developer extradited to US
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/trickbot-malware-dev-extradited-to-us-faces-60-years-in-prison/
GIST	<p>A Russian national believed to be a member of the TrickBot malware development team has been extradited to the U.S. and is currently facing charges that could get him 60 years in prison.</p> <p>38-year old Vladimir Dunaev, also known as FFX, was a malware developer that supervised the creation of TrickBot's browser injection module, the indictment alleges.</p> <p>He is the second malware developer associated with the TrickBot gang that the Department of Justice arrested this year. In February, Latvian national Alla Witte, a.k.a. Max, was arrested for writing code related to the control and deployment of ransomware.</p> <p>Old member of the gang</p>

Dunaev was [arrested in South Korea](#) in September as he was trying to leave the country. He had been forced to stay there for more than a year due to Covid-19 travel restrictions and his passport expired. The extradition completed on October 20.

Dunaev is believed to have been involved with the TrickBot gang since mid-2016 following a recruitment test that involved creating an application that simulated a SOCKS server and altering a copy of the Firefox browser.

He passed both tests with flying colors, showing skills that the TrickBot gang needed. “He’s capable of everything. Such a person is needed,” reads a conversation between two members of the gang responsible for recruiting developers.

Starting June 2016, the defendant created, modified, and updated code for the TrickBot malware gang, the [indictment](#) alleges.

Dates	Code description
July 2016 - time of the arrest	modifying Firefox web browser
December 2016 - time of the arrest	Machine Query that lets TrickBot determine the description, manufacturer, name, product, serial number, version, and content of the root file directory of an infected machine
August 2016 - December 2018	Code that grabs and saves from the web browser its name, ID, type, configuration files, cookies, history, local storage, Flash Local Shared Objects/LSO (Flash cookies)
October 2016 - time of the arrest	Code that searches for, imports, and loads files in the web browser's 'profile' folders; these contain cookies, storage, history, Flash LSO cookies. It also connects to the browser databases to make queries and to modify them
July 2016 - time of the arrest	An executable app/utility to launch and manage a web browser
July 2016 - time of the arrest	Code that collects and modifies data entries in Google Chrome LevelDB database, browsing history included

Between October 19, 2017, and March 3, 2018, members of the TrickBot gang that included Dunaev and Witte successfully wired more than \$1.3 million from victim bank accounts.

Large, well-organized group

According to the indictment, the TrickBot gang has at least 17 members, each with specific attributes within the operation:

- Malware Manager - who outlines the programming needs, manages finances, deploys TrickBot
- Malware Developer - who develops TrickBot modules and hands them to others to encrypt
- Crypter - who encrypt the TrickBot modules so that they evade antivirus detection
- Spammer - who use distribute TrickBot through spam and phishing campaigns

Created from the ashes of the Dyre banking trojan in 2015, TrickBot focused on stealing banking credentials initially, via web injection and logging the victim user’s keystrokes.

Later, it developed into modular malware that could also distribute other threats. These days, the gang has a preference for dropping ransomware on company networks, Conti in particular.

	<p>TrickBot is believed to have infected millions of computers, enabling its operators to steal personal and sensitive information (logins, credit cards, emails, passwords, dates of birth, SSNs, addresses) and steal funds from victims' banking accounts.</p> <p>The malware has impacted businesses in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, India, Italy, Mexico, Spain, and Russia.</p> <p>Apart from Dunaev and Witta, the DoJ has indicted other members of the TrickBot gang whose names have not been revealed and are located in various countries, Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine among them.</p> <p>Dunaev is currently facing multiple counts of aggravated identity theft, wire fraud, bank fraud as well as conspiracy to commit computer fraud, aggravated identity theft, and money laundering.</p> <p>All the charges against him come with a maximum penalty of 60 years in a federal prison.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/27 NRA: no comment on ransom gang attack
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/nra-no-comment-on-russian-ransomware-gang-attack-claims/
GIST	<p>The Grief ransomware gang claims to have attacked the National Rifle Association (NRA) and released stolen data as proof of the attack.</p> <p>Today, the ransomware gang added the NRA as a new victim on their data leak site while displaying screenshots of Excel spreadsheets containing US tax information and investments amounts.</p> <p>The threat actors also leaked a 2.7 MB archive titled 'National Grants.zip,' that we have been told contains alleged NRA grant applications</p> <p>NRA entry on the Grief ransomware data leak site Earlier this morning, BleepingComputer contacted the NRA multiple times, including speaking to the NRA's Director of Communications Amy Hunter but did not receive any answers regarding the alleged attack.</p> <p>The NRA later published a statement saying they do not comment on physical or electronic security of their organization.</p> <p><i>"NRA does not discuss matters relating to its physical or electronic security. However, the NRA takes extraordinary measures to protect information regarding its members, donors, and operations – and is vigilant in doing so." - Andrew Arulanandam, managing dir., NRA Public Affairs.</i></p> <p>Grief tied to Russian hacking group The Grief ransomware gang is believed to be tied to a Russian hacking group known as Evil Corp.</p> <p>Evil Corp has been active since 2009 and has been involved in numerous malicious cyber activities, including the distribution of the Dridex trojan to steal online banking credentials and steal money.</p> <p>The hacking group turned to ransomware in 2017, when they released ransomware known as BitPaymer. BitPaymer later morphed into the DoppelPaymer ransomware operation in 2019.</p> <p>After years of attacking US interests, the US Department of Justice charged members of the Evil Corp for stealing over \$100 million and added the hacking group to the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanction list.</p> <p>Soon after, the US Treasury later warned that ransomware negotiators might face civil penalties for facilitating ransom payments to gangs on the sanction list.</p>

	<p>Since then, Evil Corp has been routinely releasing new ransomware strains under different names to evade US sanctions. These ransomware families include WastedLocker, Hades, Phoenix CryptoLocker, PayLoadBin, and, more recently, the Macaw Locker.</p> <p>However, their original ransomware, DoppelPaymer, ran for years under the same name until May 2021, when they stopped listing new victims on their data leak site.</p> <p>One month later, the Grief ransomware gang emerged, with security researchers believing to be a rebrand of DoppelPaymer based on code similarities.</p> <p>As Grief is linked to Evil Corp, it is likely that ransomware negotiators will not facilitate ransom payments without the victim first getting approval from the OFAC.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Top hardware weaknesses list debuts
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/vulnerabilities-threats/top-hardware-weaknesses-list-debuts
GIST	<p>The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) today announced the first-ever 2021 Common Weakness Enumeration (CWE) Most Important Hardware Weaknesses List of common and especially serious mistakes in hardware that can lead to serious security vulnerabilities.</p> <p>Among the hardware weaknesses are system-on-a-chip, lock bit issues, firmware that can't be updated, and unprotected physical side channels.</p> <p>"Security analysts and test engineers can use the list in preparing plans for security testing and evaluation. Hardware consumers could use the list to help them to ask for more secure hardware products from their suppliers," according to the CWE site. "Finally, managers and CIOs can use the list as a measuring stick of progress in their efforts to secure their hardware and ascertain where to direct resources to develop security tools or automation processes that mitigate a wide class of vulnerabilities by eliminating the underling root cause."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 SEO poisoning to distribute ransomware
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/seo-poisoning-used-to-distribute-ransomware
GIST	<p>Attacks involving SEO poisoning -- where adversaries artificially increase the search engine ranking of websites hosting their malware to lure potential victims -- are on the rise.</p> <p>In the past few months, attackers have used the tactic in at least two campaigns across Menlo Security's global customer base, researchers there say: one to distribute the REvil ransomware sample and the other to drop a backdoor called SolarMarker.</p> <p>The attacks highlight recent efforts by threat actors to target users instead of organizations in their malicious campaigns, Menlo Security said in a report this week. The security vendor described the trend as likely being driven by adversaries seeking to take advantage of the current remote work environment where the lines between personal and business device use have blurred.</p> <p>In search engine optimization (SEO) poisoning attacks, adversaries first compromise legitimate websites and then inject specific keywords into the website that users might commonly search for via their preferred search engine. The goal in injecting the keywords is to ensure that the compromised website surfaces near or on top of search engine results when a user searches for something using the keywords.</p> <p>In the SolarMarker campaign that Menlo Security observed, users who clicked on the poisoned link were directed to a malicious PDF hosted on the compromised site and eventually ended up with the backdoor on their systems.</p>

Menlo Security said it observed over 2,000 unique search terms that led users to sites hosting SolarMarker. Examples included "blue-jacket-of-the-quarter-write-up-examples," "industrial-hygiene-walk-through-survey-checklist," and "Sports Mental Toughness Questionnaire." The campaign targeted users across numerous industry verticals, including automotive, retail, financial services, manufacturing, transportation, and telecommunications.

Websites hosting the malicious PDF were scattered around the world. While many were in the US, the security vendor said it noticed sites in countries such as Iran and Turkey that were also being used in the campaign. Sites serving the malicious PDF included government websites and domains belonging to well-known educational institutions, the security vendor said.

Vinay Pidathala, director of security research at Menlo Security, says that when adversaries choose what keywords they want to use in an SEO poisoning campaign, they likely start off with terms that are of interest to users within specific industries they might be targeting.

"In the [approximately] 2,000 search terms we noticed, we consistently saw customers searching for terms related to their industries," Pidathala says. "One theory is that they could be using some sort of A/B testing, where initially they use a wide range of search terms, monitor the efficacy of each of these search terms, figure out which search terms are more widely searched for, and then later weaponize it."

High Rate of Success

Pidathala describes SEO poisoning as a relatively effective way for attackers to distribute malware or lure users to malicious sites. In both the campaigns that Menlo Security recently observed — REvil and SolarMarker — a relatively high percent of users clicked on the malicious link in the search engine results, he says.

"Specifically in the SolarMarker campaign, we saw that about 42% of users who searched for a certain term eventually ended up clicking on the link in the malicious PDF, which would drop the malware — [proving] the effectiveness of this campaign," he says.

Menlo Security said that all the compromised websites in the SolarMarker campaign were WordPress sites that contained a plug-in called Formidable Forms. It's unclear, however, whether the plug-in played any role in allowing the attackers to break into the sites.

"We are neither sure if Formidable Forms was compromised or if there was a vulnerability in Formidable Forms," Pidathala says. "We are merely pointing out that in all the WordPress sites we observed, this was the common plug-in installed."

The attackers also employed a relatively simple evasion technique — using large-sized payloads — to try and sneak SolarMarker past anti-malware tools.

"The largest payload we observed was 123MB," Pidathala says. "Unfortunately, tools tend to have a file size limit on what they can or cannot analyze."

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HEADLINE	10/28 Ransomware 'golden era' for cybercriminals
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/ransomware-its-a-golden-era-for-cyber-criminals-and-it-could-get-worse-before-it-gets-better/?&web_view=true
GIST	Ransomware is the most significant cybersecurity threat facing organisations today as increasingly professional and sophisticated cyber criminals follow the money in order to maximise the profit from illicit campaigns.

ENISNA, the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity, has released the latest edition of [the ENISA Threat Landscape](#) (ETL) report, which analyses cyber-criminal activity between April 2020 and July 2021. It warns of a surge in cyber criminality, much of it driven by the monetisation of [ransomware attacks](#).

Although the paper warns that many different cybersecurity threats are on the rise, ransomware represents the 'prime threat' faced by organisations today, with a 150% rise in ransomware attacks during the reporting period. And there are fears that despite [the problem of ransomware attracting the attention of world leaders](#), the problem will get worse before it gets better.

"We are observing the golden era of ransomware -- it has become a national security priority -- and some argue that it has not yet reached the peak of its impact," the paper warns.

Cyber criminals trigger a ransomware attack by secretly compromising networks -- [often via phishing attacks, compromising cloud services or exploiting vulnerabilities](#) -- before installing file-encrypting malware across as many systems as possible. Victims are locked out of files and servers, and the cyber criminals demand a ransom payment -- [made in cryptocurrency](#) -- in exchange for the decryption key. In many cases, [the victim will pay up](#).

One of the key drivers behind the increased threat of ransomware is [the amount of money that can be made](#); cyber criminals can walk away with millions of dollars from a single attack. It's likely that the success of ransomware campaigns will only encourage more bad actors to get involved with ransomware, particularly when it comes to hands-on operations that can cripple an entire network.

"Our assessment is that more cyber criminals will very likely be attracted to shifting their targeting to focus on targeted ransomware operations and replicate these successes," said the ENISA paper.

Incidents like the [Darkside ransomware attack against Colonial Pipeline](#) demonstrated how disruptive a ransomware attack can be, to the extent it has an impact on everyday lives. The incident led to gas supply shortages in the North Eastern United States, causing people to try and stockpile supplies. In the end, [Colonial paid cyber criminals almost \\$5 million](#) for the decryption key.

While events like this receive a lot of attention, it's believed that there are many more ransomware attacks where victims quietly pay the ransom without any publicity. "The incidents that are publicly disclosed or that receive media attention are only the tip of the iceberg," ENISA warns.

However, the report also notes that action is being taken on ransomware, with governments having "stepped up their game", recognising the threat and conducting multinational efforts in an attempt to deal with the issue. The report also details how the last year has [seen several arrests made over involvement in ransomware gangs](#), indicating that, for some cyber criminals at least, their actions have consequences.

"Given the prominence of ransomware, having the right threat intelligence at hand will help the whole cybersecurity community to develop the techniques needed to best prevent and respond to such type of attacks," said ENISA executive director, Juhan Lepassaar.

"Such an approach can only rally around the necessity now emphasised by the European Council conclusions to reinforce the fight against cybercrime and ransomware more specifically."

Organisations are encouraged to develop [a mitigation strategy involving secure backups](#), so in the event of a ransomware attack, the network can be restored without giving into the ransom demand.

Operating systems and software should also be kept updated with [the latest security patches](#) so cyber criminals can't exploit known vulnerabilities to enter or move around the network. [Applying multi-factor authentication](#) to accounts can also help prevent intrusions that could eventually lead to a ransomware attack.

HEADLINE	10/28 WordPress plugin bug impacts 1M sites
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/wordpress-plugin-bug-impacts-1m-sites-allows-malicious-redirects/?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>The OptinMonster plugin is affected by a high-severity flaw that allows unauthorized API access and sensitive information disclosure on roughly a million WordPress sites.</p> <p>Tracked as CVE-2021-39341, the flaw was discovered by researcher Chloe Chamberland on September 28, 2021, with a patch becoming available on October 7, 2021.</p> <p>All users of the OptinMonster plugin are advised to upgrade to version 2.6.5 or later, as all earlier versions are affected.</p> <p>API trouble OptinMonster is one of the most popular WordPress plugins used to create beautiful opt-in forms that help site owners convert visitors to subscribers/customers.</p> <p>It is essentially a lead generator and monetization tool, and thanks to its ease of use and abundance of features, it's deployed on approximately a million sites.</p> <p>As Chamberland explains in her vulnerability disclosure report, OptinMonster's power relies upon API endpoints that allow seamless integration and a streamlined design process.</p> <p>However, the implementation of these endpoints isn't always secure, and the most critical example concerns the '/wp-json/omapp/v1/support' endpoint.</p> <p>This endpoint can disclose data such as the site's full path on the server, API keys used for requests on the site, and more.</p> <p>An attacker holding the API key could make changes on the OptinMonster accounts or even plant malicious JavaScript snippets on the site.</p> <p>The site would execute this code every time an OptinMonster element was activated by a visitor without anyone's knowledge.</p> <p>To make matters worse, the attacker wouldn't even have to authenticate on the targeted site to access the API endpoint, as an HTTP request would bypass security checks under certain, easy to meet conditions.</p> <p>While the case of the '/wp-json/omapp/v1/support' endpoint is the worse, it's not the only insecure REST-API endpoint vulnerable to exploitation.</p> <p>After the researcher's report reached the OptinMonster team, the developers of the popular WordPress plugin realized that the entire API needed revisiting.</p> <p>As such, you must install any OptinMonster updates that land on your WordPress dashboard over the following weeks, as these will likely address additional API flaws.</p> <p>In the meantime, all API keys that could have been stolen were invalidated immediately, and site owners were forced to generate new keys.</p> <p>This case highlights that even widely deployed and extremely popular WordPress plugins can carry multiple undiscovered flaws for extensive periods.</p> <p>If you are a site owner, try to use the minimum number of plugins to cover the necessary functionality and usability and apply plugin updates as soon as possible.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 YouTube mistake shows power over media
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/business/youtube-novara.html?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=Business
GIST	<p>LONDON — The email subject line that arrived at 10:19 a.m. on Tuesday carried some of the worst information a small online news outlet can receive: “Novara Media we have removed your channel from YouTube.”</p> <p>Novara had spent years using YouTube to attract more than 170,000 subscribers for its left-leaning coverage of issues like climate change, capitalism and social policy. Suddenly, and without warning, that powerful distribution tool was zapped — leaving people in the newsroom wondering how the organization could survive.</p> <p>“We had this ambient awareness of our dependence on these big tech platforms,” Ash Sarkar, a contributing editor, said in an interview at Novara’s one-room office inside a converted biscuit factory. “But there’s nothing like having your livelihood snatched away from you to make you feel really disempowered.”</p> <p>Every hour, YouTube deletes nearly 2,000 channels. The deletions are meant to keep out spam, misinformation, financial scams, nudity, hate speech and other material that it says violates its policies.</p> <p>But the rules are opaque and sometimes arbitrarily enforced — or mistakenly enforced, in Novara’s case. Policy experts say Novara’s experience is indicative of the thorny free speech issues YouTube faces as the world’s largest online video service.</p> <p>The gatekeeper role leads to criticism from multiple directions. Many on the right of the political spectrum in the United States and Europe claim that YouTube unfairly blocks them. Some civil society groups say YouTube should do more to stop the spread of illicit content and misinformation.</p> <p>Sometimes that leaves organizations like Novara in the middle.</p> <p>After an outcry online, YouTube restored Novara’s channel in a few hours, saying that it had been removed in error. But other independent journalists, activists and creators on YouTube often don’t have similar success, particularly in countries like Belarus, Russia and Turkey where YouTube is under pressure from authorities to remove opposition content and where the company does not have as much language or cultural expertise. Roughly 500 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute globally in different languages.</p> <p>“It’s impossible to get our minds around what it means to try and govern that kind of volume of content,” said Evelyn Douek, senior research fellow at the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University. “YouTube is a juggernaut, by some metrics as big or bigger than Facebook.”</p> <p>In its email on Tuesday morning, YouTube said Novara was guilty of “repeated violations” of YouTube’s community guidelines, without elaborating. Novara’s staff was left guessing what had caused the problem.</p> <p>YouTube typically has a three-strikes policy before deleting a channel. It had penalized Novara only once before, after a news segment with scenes from an anti-vaccination rally — and YouTube later reversed that decision. Novara’s last show released before the deletion was about sewage policy, which hardly seemed worthy of YouTube’s attention.</p> <p>One of the organization’s few previous interactions with YouTube was when the video service sent Novara a silver plaque for reaching 100,000 subscribers.</p> <p>After Novara received the email that its channel was deleted, its internal Slack messaging channel was flooded with panicked messages about what to do next. Staff members worried it had been a coordinated campaign by critics of their coverage to file complaints with YouTube, triggering its software to block</p>

their channel, a tactic sometimes used by right-wing groups to go after opponents. Ms. Sarkar, who has more than 350,000 followers on Twitter, is often a target of racist and misogynistic abuse online.

An editor, Gary McQuiggin, filled out YouTube's online appeal form. He then tried using YouTube's online chat bot, speaking with a woman named "Rose," who said, "I know this is important," before the conversation crashed.

Angry and frustrated, Novara posted a statement on [Twitter](#) and other social media services about the deletion. "We call on YouTube to immediately reinstate our account," it said. The post drew attention in the British press and from [members](#) of [Parliament](#).

Within a few hours, Novara's channel had been restored.

Later, YouTube said Novara had been mistakenly flagged as spam, without providing further detail. "We work quickly to review all flagged content, but with millions of hours of video uploaded on YouTube every day, on occasion we make the wrong call," YouTube said in a statement.

Novara's editors said they had been careful not to run afoul of YouTube's rules. It has relied on the platform to publish all its videos, and sometimes used YouTube's studio in London to film. Staff mined Google's analytics tools for ways to find new viewers. About 92 percent of Novara's budget comes from individual donors, many of whom discovered them through YouTube.

"They are a monopoly, there is no alternative," said Michael Walker, who hosts Novara's show "[TyskySour](#)." "If we move to Vimeo or whatever other platform, we wouldn't acquire the viewers."

In Britain, where newspapers like Rupert Murdoch's The Sun skew hard to the right, Novara's coverage has stood out on the other side of the political spectrum. Subscribers to its YouTube channel grew over the past two years, helped by its critical coverage of the British government's handling of the pandemic.

Novara's shows are wonky, occasionally confrontational and unapologetically left-wing. "Luxury communism," as Ms. Sarkar describes in her Twitter bio.

Everyone at Novara is paid the same wage, 16.50 British pounds per hour, regardless of rank.

Ed Procter, chief executive of the Independent Monitor for the Press, the body that Novara voluntarily uses as its regulator in Britain, said it was at least the fifth time a news outlet had material deleted by YouTube, Facebook or Twitter without warning. Often, no reason is given for removing the content, he said.

"We have real concerns about platforms that are arbitrarily acting as regulators by default," said Mr. Procter. He said the regulator had never received a complaint about Novara. "What you saw in the Novara Media situation is something we can see becoming a regular occurrence."

Mr. Procter and others said the volume of wrongful takedowns is likely to increase as internet platforms face pressure from policymakers worldwide to do more to stop the spread of misinformation, racism and illicit content.

Under a draft law in Britain, companies could face billions of dollars worth of fines for not deleting content considered "legal but harmful," a classification many critics say is overly broad and that will give companies even more discretion over what content is acceptable. The law includes provisions to protect journalism outlets, but there are disagreements about who would qualify.

Sarah Clarke, the head of Europe and Central Asia for Article 19, a group championing free expression rights, said Novara was lucky.

	<p>“What was so frustrating was that in a powerful English-language country like the U.K., when there is an outcry YouTube pays attention and reverses its decision,” said Ms. Clarke. “We rarely see this in other non-Anglophone countries.”</p> <p>At Novara, the team had turned the experience into fresh content, running a special live show at 5 p.m. on Tuesday.</p> <p>“We’re back!” Mr. Walker exclaimed.</p> <p>The next morning, Mr. McQuiggin informed colleagues another message had come from YouTube. “They would like to apologize,” he said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 EU digital Covid certificates key leaked?
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/eu-investigating-leak-of-private-key-used-to-forge-covid-passes/
GIST	<p>The private key used to sign EU Digital Covid certificates has been reportedly leaked and is being circulated on messaging apps and online data breach marketplaces.</p> <p>The key has also been misused to generate forged certificates, such as those for Adolf Hitler, Mickey Mouse, Sponge Bob—all of which are being recognized as valid by the official government apps.</p> <p>The Digital Covid certificate, or the "Green Pass" helps European Union residents travel across borders seamlessly by proving that they have either been vaccinated against COVID-19, received a negative test result, or successfully recovered from COVID-19.</p> <p>Valid 'Adolf Hitler' Covid certificate generated</p> <p>This week, users reported seeing the private key for EU Digital Covid certificates circulating on messaging apps, like Telegram.</p> <p>The private key is used to sign "Green Pass," European Union's equivalent of a vaccine passport, and/or proof of negative COVID-19 status that can help travelers cross borders seamlessly.</p> <p>"On various groups (Telegram mainly) are circulating several forged Green Pass with valid signature... There is the possibility that a database of private keys is compromised and this may [end] up in a break of the chain of trust in the Green Pass architecture," stated GitHub user Emanuele Laface.</p> <p>Threat actors who can get their hands on the private key could easily forge digital certificates or QR codes that may then be recognized as 'legitimate' by the official government apps.</p> <p>Such is the case for a fake Adolf Hitler Green Pass certificate which is being recognized valid by the official Verifica C19 apps, according to penetration tester <i>reversebrain</i>:</p> <p>The penetration tester later reported, the forged certificates were no longer being recognized by the government's Verifica C19 apps, indicating the leaked private key had been revoked.</p> <p>However, tests by BleepingComputer conducted today reveal both the Android and iOS versions of the Verifica C19 app are still treating the QR code for the Adolf Hitler certificate as valid:</p> <p>Our tests were conducted via Verifica C19 app version 1.1.5, released October 19th on Google Play, and October 26th on the Apple App store.</p> <p>Additionally, forged certificates for "Mickey Mouse," "Sponge Bob," and other fictional characters were successfully recognized by the app, as seen by BleepingComputer.</p>

EU vaccination passports on sale for \$300

BleepingComputer also observed multiple users posting private keys on underground forums and discussing methods to "make EU green pass."

"Recently the European Union is making the green pass mandatory for many activities, I see that there are several sites that can perfectly read the QR code by decrypting it, I wanted to know if someone is able to re-encrypt data and generate QR code in short, generate a false green pass," asked one forum member.

Some traders are seen offering "Covid European passports with the entry as vaccinated in Poland," each at a price of \$300.

The QR codes contained in the EU Digital COVID Certificates include a digital signature to protect against their falsification. When the certificate is checked using the official apps, the QR code is scanned and the signature is verified.

The official government docs [state](#) that each issuing body, such as a hospital, a test centre, a health authority, has its own digital signature key. All of these private keys are stored in a secure database in each country.

But, it is also not clear if the key compromise impacts every single EU country or issuing bodies from select countries only.

According to the QR code data seen by BleepingComputer, the fake certificates circulating online have been issued from different countries—France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, and so on, indicating the issue could very well impact the entire EU.

EU Government aware and investigating the 'malicious act'

BleepingComputer reached out to [CERT](#) teams of different EU nations and it seems the issue is being investigated:

"We are aware of alleged fraudulent manipulations of EU Covid Certificate QR code and have seen the reports," an EU spokesperson told BleepingComputer.

"As a priority, we are following closely the developments of this incident and are in contact with the relevant member states authorities that are investigating and putting in place remedial actions."

"We firmly condemn this malicious act, representing an interference in a sensitive and strategic area, at a time when health services in all Member States are under pressure fighting the pandemic."

"The incident has no impact on the security and integrity of the EU Gateway managed by the Commission," concludes the Commission in their statement to us.

The fact that anybody is able to forge cryptographically-valid COVID certificates brings into question the authenticity of even legitimate certificates issued by EU government bodies.

Should this be the case, the private key would need to be revoked by the government authorities for the entire EU, thereby invalidating both forged and legitimate COVID certificates.

As such, by the time the situation is resolved and the private keys are reset, holders of legitimate EU Digital Covid certificates will very likely need to generate fresh Green Passes.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Core REvil ransomware member identified
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/german-investigators-identify-revil-ransomware-gang-core-member/

GIST	<p>German investigators have reportedly identified a Russian man whom they believe to be one of REvil ransomware gang's core members, one of the most notorious and successful ransomware groups in recent years.</p> <p>The man is presenting himself as a cryptocurrency investor and trader, but German authorities (including Bundeskriminalamt and Landeskriminalamt Baden-Württemberg) think otherwise after tracking some of the Bitcoin payments he made over the years.</p> <p>While the suspect's real identity has not been revealed, German media is calling him by the fictitious name 'Nikolay K.', and report that investigators linked him to Bitcoin ransom payments associated with the GandCrab ransomware group.</p> <p>Law enforcement tracked these payments following attacks against a software development firm and the State Theater in Stuttgart.</p> <p>The same sources claim that the investigators have found strong links between REvil and GandCrab, something that has been suggested numerous times by security researchers and analysts.</p> <p>Nikolay K. didn't hold back when it came to boasting on social media and showcasing his holidays on the Mediterranean, posting images from lavish yacht parties.</p> <p>But he wasn't careful enough when it came to hiding his true identity, falsely assuming that masking his links to ransomware operations with crypto-investment would be enough.</p> <p>Tracked down using an email address</p> <p>As the reports detail, the police were able to find Nikolay's email address, which he used to register to over 60 websites, as well as a phone number that he used for his Telegram account.</p> <p>That account was supposedly used for legit crypto-trading, but the police were reportedly able to link multiple transactions worth over 400,000 Euros in crypto to ransom payment events.</p> <p>Since the crackdown on REvil's infrastructure, from two weeks ago, the group's members have been extra cautious, but it appears that Nikolay was unaware of how close the investigators really were to arrest him. This summer, Nikolay's wife traveled for holidays alone, while the ransomware actors stayed in Russia, possibly to avoid any unexpected arrests while on foreign grounds.</p> <p>Neither the Federal Criminal Police Office of Baden-Württemberg nor the Stuttgart public prosecutor's office have offered a comment on whether they have issued an extradition request to Russia yet, so we are still waiting for an official confirmation on the above.</p> <p>Considering the dimensions that the ransomware threat has taken at the highest political level, it would be a surprise to see the Russians denying the prosecution of Nikolay.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Facebook changing name to Meta
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Business/facebook-announces-changing-company-meta/story?id=80683908
GIST	<p>In the shadow of mounting controversies for his beleaguered tech firm, CEO Mark Zuckerberg laid out his vision for the future of the internet at a company conference Thursday, which he sees as evolving on the so-called "metaverse."</p> <p>Zuckerberg also announced that the name of his tech giant will be changed to "Meta" to reflect the shifting interests, though critics have accused the company of attempting to use its high-profile name change announcement to shift focus from the renewed scrutiny it has faced from lawmakers and beyond in recent weeks.</p>

The metaverse, a three-dimensional digital world created by augmented and virtual reality products and services, will be "the successor to the mobile internet," Zuckerberg said during his keynote speech to kick off Facebook's Connect conference on Thursday. The chief executive demonstrated some of the experiences he said will soon be available in the digital realm -- including connecting with friends and family, gaming, working out and even working remotely via a digital avatar and VR hardware.

"We're now looking at and reporting on our business as two different segments, one for our family of apps and one for work on future platforms, and as part of this, it is time for us to adopt a new company brand to encompass everything that we do to reflect who we are and what we hope to build," he said.

"I am proud to announce that starting today, our company is now meta," Zuckerberg added.

The Facebook chief said the word comes from the Greek term for "beyond," and is meant to symbolize that "there is always more to build, there is always a next chapter to the story."

"Our mission remains the same still about bringing people together, our apps and their brands, they're not changing either," the CEO added. "We're still the company that designs technology around people, now we have a new North Star to help bring the metaverse to life, and we have a new name that reflects the full breadth of what we do and the future that we want to help build."

Finally, Zuckerberg said, "From now on, we're going to be metaverse-first, not Facebook-first."

The name change announcement comes just weeks after a company whistleblower, Frances Haugen, testified before lawmakers, alleging blatant disregard from Facebook executives when they learned their platform could have harmful effects on democracy and the mental health of young people.

Haugen, a former Facebook product manager, accused Facebook of "choosing to prioritize its profits over people" in her opening statement before lawmakers on the Senate Commerce subcommittee.

"You can declare moral bankruptcy and we can figure out a fix [to] these things together because we solve problems together," Haugen said.

Zuckerberg did not directly address Haugen's claims during his remarks Thursday, saying only, "the last few years have been humbling for me and our company in a lot of ways." During his remarks, which lasted over an hour, he mostly demonstrated how he sees people could use the metaverse and virtual or augmented reality tools in the near and far-off future.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	10/29 Philippine Islamist militant leader killed
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippine-islamist-militant-leader-wife-killed-clash-says-military-2021-10-29/
GIST	<p>MANILA, Oct 29 (Reuters) - Philippine troops killed a militant leader and his wife on Friday, in what military officials described as a major blow to an Islamist group suspected of carrying out a series of bombings and attacks in the country's south.</p> <p>Salahuddin Hassan, the "overall emir" of the group, Daulah Islamiyah - Philippines, and his wife Jehana Minbida, were killed in a special operation in Talayan town, in Maguindanao province, the military said.</p> <p>More than two dozen militants, who were with the couple, managed to escape during the 30-minute gunbattle with troops, according to the military.</p>

	<p>"With the death of their leader, we are certain that the group will crumble," said Major General Alfredo Rosario Jr., chief of the military's Western Mindanao Command. "This is a significant breakthrough in our campaign against terrorism in central Mindanao."</p> <p>The bodies of Hassan and his wife were recovered along with a R4 rifle, bandolier, and ammunition magazines, military chief General Jose Faustino Jr said in a statement.</p> <p>Hassan's group was also involved in a night market bombing in President Rodrigo Duterte's hometown Davao City in September 2016 that left 15 people dead and dozens injured, the military said. The military said Hassan's wife ran the group's finances.</p> <p>Several Islamist militant groups have been active in the southern island of Mindanao, including Abu Sayyaf, a group that has proclaimed allegiance to Islamic State and is known for kidnapping for ransom.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/29 Taliban push to unlock Afghan \$billions
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/just-give-us-our-money-taliban-push-unlock-afghan-billions-abroad-2021-10-29/
GIST	<p>FRANKFURT, Oct 29 (Reuters) - Afghanistan's Taliban government is pressing for the release of billions of dollars of central bank reserves as the drought-stricken nation faces a cash crunch, mass starvation and a new migration crisis.</p> <p>Afghanistan parked billions of dollars in assets overseas with the U.S. Federal Reserve and other central banks in Europe, but that money has been frozen since the Islamist Taliban ousted the Western-backed government in August.</p> <p>A spokesman for the finance ministry said the government would respect human rights, including the education of women, as he sought fresh funds on top of humanitarian aid that he said offered only "small relief".</p> <p>Under Taliban rule from 1996-2001, women were largely shut out of paid employment and education and normally had to cover their faces and be accompanied by a male relative when they left home.</p> <p>"The money belongs to the Afghan nation. Just give us our own money," ministry spokesman Ahmad Wali Haqmal told Reuters. "Freezing this money is unethical and is against all international laws and values."</p> <p>One top central bank official called on European countries including Germany to release their share of the reserves to avoid an economic collapse that could trigger mass migration towards Europe.</p> <p>"The situation is desperate and the amount of cash is dwindling," Shah Mehrabi, a board member of the Afghan Central Bank, told Reuters. "There is enough right now ... to keep Afghanistan going until the end of the year.</p> <p>"Europe is going to be affected most severely, if Afghanistan does not get access to this money," said Mehrabi.</p> <p>"You will have a double whammy of not being able to find bread and not being able to afford it. People will be desperate. They are going to go to Europe," he said.</p> <p>The call for assistance comes as Afghanistan faces a collapse of its fragile economy. The departure of U.S.-led forces and many international donors left the country without grants that financed three quarters of public spending.</p> <p>The finance ministry said it had a daily tax take of roughly 400 million Afghanis (\$4.4 million).</p>

Although Western powers want to avert a humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan, they have refused to officially recognise the Taliban government.

Haqmal said Afghanistan would allow women an education, although not in the same classrooms as men.

Human rights, he said, would be respected but within the framework of Islamic law, which would not include gay rights.

"LGBT... That's against our Sharia law," he said.

Mehrabi hopes that while the United States has recently said it will not release its lion's share of roughly \$9 billion of funds, European countries might.

He said Germany held half a billion dollars of Afghan money and that it and other European countries should release those funds.

Mehrabi said that Afghanistan needed \$150 million each month to "prevent imminent crisis", keeping the local currency and prices stable, adding that any transfer could be monitored by an auditor.

"If reserves remain frozen, Afghan importers will not be able to pay for their shipments, banks will start to collapse, food will become scarce, grocery stores will be empty," Mehrabi said.

He said that about \$431 million of central bank reserves were held with German lender Commerzbank, as well as a further roughly \$94 million with Germany's central bank, the Bundesbank.

The Bank for International Settlements, an umbrella group for global central banks in Switzerland, holds a further approximately \$660 million. All three declined to comment.

The Taliban took back power in Afghanistan in August after the United States pulled out its troops, almost 20 years after the Islamists were ousted by U.S.-led forces following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Russia looks to Taliban to contain IS
SOURCE	https://eurasianet.org/event-russia-looks-to-taliban-to-contain-islamic-state-in-afghanistan
GIST	<p>In the 1990s, Russia viewed the Taliban as a dire threat to Central Asia's security. Now, the Kremlin hopes the Taliban can be a bulwark against the spread of Islamic radicalism beyond Afghanistan's borders, according to leading Russian experts on the region.</p> <p>The Taliban's lightning takeover of Afghanistan in August, coupled with the abrupt withdrawal of U.S. forces, forced the Kremlin to assume the role of custodian of Central Asia's security. Russia sees the main threat to regional stability as arising from the presence of Islamic State (ISKP) fighters and other militants primarily in northern Afghanistan, according to Russian experts participating in a virtual roundtable discussion hosted by Columbia University's Harriman Institute. [Eurasianet is hosted by the Harriman Institute.]</p> <p>Though relatively small in number, ISKP and other radical elements in northern Afghanistan have the potential to cause trouble, said Ekaterina Stepanova, a top researcher at the National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations in Moscow. Any instability in the north could draw in Central Asian "state and non-state actors," Stepanova said.</p> <p>"We shouldn't overestimate the risk, but we shouldn't underestimate it either," Stepanova told the October 25 event, Russian Relations with Central Asia and Afghanistan after the U.S. Withdrawal.</p> <p>Given the inherent hostility between the Taliban and ISKP, rooted in differences over radical Islamic doctrine, Russia is hoping the new rulers in Kabul can keep a lid on northern militancy. In placing its</p>

hopes in the Taliban, Russia believes the movement isn't interested in exporting its harsh methods of organizing Islamic society beyond Afghanistan's borders.

The Taliban is no longer in the "avant-garde" of the global jihadist movement, said Ivan Safranchuk, the director of the Center for Euro-Asian Research and a senior fellow at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), offering an explanation for Russia's engagement with the movement. As long as the risks in the north are contained, Moscow appears willing to give the Taliban a free hand to govern Afghanistan as it sees fit, Safranchuk and Stepanova indicated. That means Russia could turn a blind eye to egregious rights violations involving women and national minority groups.

"The uncontested priority [for Russia] is stability. The question is, is it stability at any price?" Stepanova said. "Is it stability at the price of the Second Emirate [in Afghanistan]?"

Safranchuk said early hopes have faded in Moscow that the experience of the past two decades might soften the Taliban's governing style. "They are in the same mindset" as in the 1990s, he said, describing their approach as "Stalin-style" Bolshevism.

Russian support for the Taliban is also conditioned on the movement's ability to address the basic social and economic needs of the population. It is too early to evaluate the Taliban's performance in this area, Safranchuk said, adding that "preliminary answers" will only be apparent next spring and summer. If the Taliban can't manage, the threat will grow of a refugee crisis that impacts Central Asia's frontline states.

Stepanova added that Moscow would prefer to see a more inclusive government in Kabul, viewing diversity as a way of improving the government's ability to exert authority over the ethnic patchwork that is Afghanistan. In addition, Taliban leaders will need to show that they can keep "shadowy elements" within the movement in line, she said.

Central Asian states have been trying to maintain diplomatic room for maneuver with the Taliban, said Nargis Kassenova, director of the Program on Central Asia at Harvard University's Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies. Uzbekistan remains eager to keep projects for energy and transit corridors from falling by the wayside. Tajikistan, meanwhile, is presently the lone Central Asian state [trying to pressure the Taliban](#), striving to defend the interests of Afghanistan's sizable ethnic Tajik minority.

The Taliban's steady moves to reassert strict social policies means Central Asian options for diplomatic dealings are shrinking, Kassenova said. If instability rises in Afghanistan, all eyes in Central Asia will turn to Russia. "Can Russia deliver?" Kassenova asked, referring to Moscow's capacity to preserve regional order.

Safranchuk and Stepanova did not delve into how Russia might respond if the Taliban proves incapable of stabilizing the country. Stepanova also downplayed expectations that the Taliban's return to power would have a fast impact on reducing narcotics production and trafficking in the region, saying stabilization is a precondition for any successful crackdown on the drug trade. "First peace, drugs next," she said.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Taliban's secretive war against IS
SOURCE	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-59080871
GIST	<p>Every few days, bodies are dumped on the outskirts of the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad.</p> <p>Some have been shot or hanged, some beheaded. Many have handwritten notes stuffed into their pockets, accusing them of being members of Afghanistan's branch of the Islamic State.</p> <p>No-one claims responsibility for the gruesome, extra-judicial killings, but the Taliban are widely assumed to be responsible. IS carried out a suicide bombing in August outside Kabul airport that killed more than 150 people, and is a fierce rival of the Taliban. The two groups are now engaged in a murky and bloody battle. Jalalabad is the frontline.</p>

Afghanistan is now more peaceful, following the end of the Taliban's insurgency. In Jalalabad, however, their forces are facing an near-daily stream of targeted attacks. IS, known locally as "Daesh," is using some of the same hit-and-run tactics that the Taliban so successfully employed against the previous government, including roadside bombs and stealthy assassinations. IS accuses the Taliban of being "apostates" for not being sufficiently hardline; the Taliban dismiss IS as heretical extremists.

In Nangarhar province, home to Jalalabad, the head of the Taliban's intelligence services is Dr Bashir. He has a ferocious reputation. He previously helped to drive IS out of a small stronghold it had established in neighbouring Kunar.

Dr Bashir denies any link to the corpses left on display by the roadside, but proudly states his men have arrested dozens of IS members. Many IS fighters who had been imprisoned under the previous government escaped from jail during the chaos surrounding the Taliban takeover

In public, Dr Bashir and the rest of the Taliban play down the threat of IS. They say the war in Afghanistan is finally over, and they are bringing peace and security to Afghanistan. Anything that undermines that narrative is unwelcome. Dr Bashir goes so far as to claim that IS does not even formally exist in Afghanistan, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

"The name 'Daesh' refers to Syria and Iraq," he says. "There is no miscreant group with the name of 'Daesh' here in Afghanistan."

Instead he refers to the militants as "a group of traitors who have rebelled against our Islamic government".

In fact, IS is not only formally present in Afghanistan, it has established a specific offshoot or "province" covering the country, "IS-Khorasan" - using an ancient name for the central Asian region. The group first established its presence in Afghanistan in 2015 and carried out horrific attacks in the following years, but since the Taliban takeover it has launched suicide bombings in areas of the country its militants were never previously seen.

Earlier this month, IS attacked mosques belonging to the Shia minority in the northern city of Kunduz and the Taliban's stronghold of Kandahar.

Dr Bashir, however, insists there is no cause for concern. "We tell the world not to worry," he says. "If a small group of traitors rises up and carries out such attacks, God willing, just as we defeated a coalition of 52 countries on the battlefield... they will be defeated too." Having fought an insurgency war for two decades, Dr Bashir adds, "it is easy for us prevent a guerrilla war".

But fears over the growth of IS are shared by Afghans already exhausted from years of bloodshed as well as neighbouring countries and the West. American officials have warned that IS in Afghanistan could develop the capacity to launch attacks abroad within six months to a year.

For the moment, IS does not control any territory in Afghanistan. The group had previously managed to establish bases in both Nangarhar and Kunar provinces, before being driven out by assaults from the Taliban, as well as Afghan army units backed by American airstrikes. The group has just a few thousand fighters compared to around 70,000 Taliban members, who are now equipped with American weapons.

But there are fears IS could end up recruiting some of the other Central Asian and Pakistani foreign fighters believed to be based in the country, as well as disillusioned Taliban members if rival factions develop within the group in the future. The US is hoping to continue using so-called "over the horizon" strikes, launched from outside Afghanistan, to target IS. The Taliban however, are bullish about being able to take on the insurgents alone.

	<p>Many members of IS defected to the militants from the Taliban and the Pakistani Taliban, a linked but separate group. "We know them very well, and they know us very well," one Taliban figure tells me, smiling darkly.</p> <p>In recent days, dozens of IS members have surrendered to Dr Bashir's forces in Nangarhar. One, a former Taliban member, tells us he grew disillusioned after defecting to IS.</p> <p>Unlike the Taliban, who have repeatedly stressed that their only aim was to establish an "Islamic Emirate" in Afghanistan, IS do have global ambitions, he tell us.</p> <p>IS "would issue threats to everyone, to the whole world. They wanted to bring their rule to the whole world," he says. But "words are different from actions," he adds. "They are not powerful enough to take control of Afghanistan."</p> <p>Many Afghans wearily refer to the uptick in IS attacks as the start of a "new game" in the country. In Jalalabad, it's not just the Taliban who are being targeted. Civil society activist Abdul Rahman Mawen was driving home from a wedding earlier this month when gunmen opened fire on his vehicle. His two young sons, aged 10 and 12 cowered in the car as their father was shot dead. IS issued a short statement claiming responsibility.</p> <p>Speaking from the family's home, his brother, Shad Noor, is despondent. "From the bottom of my heart, when the Taliban took power we were very happy and optimistic: that corruption, murders, explosions would be eradicated," he says.</p> <p>"But now we are realising a new phenomenon is being imposed upon us, by the name of Daesh."</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Islamic State sinks roots across Africa
SOURCE	https://www.defenceweb.co.za/security/national-security/islamic-state-sinks-roots-across-africa/
GIST	<p>The Islamic State group, which once held about a third of Syrian territory and even more ground in Iraq, now oversees a network of affiliates of varying sizes across Africa.</p> <p>Each affiliate arose in disparate regions with unique histories and grievances. Groups exploiting those grievances through extortion and violence eventually took on the brand known globally as ISIS. Now the international community is joining African nations in looking for ways to combat the spread.</p> <p>Islamic State group influence in Africa has grown yearly since 2014, according to a 2021 Sky News report. By 2019, at least 22 African countries had seen suspected IS-linked activity, even if no affiliate was based there. By 2020, eight countries had seen an increase in such violence. Those eight represent West Africa's Sahel, the current epicenter of Islamic State group violence on the continent, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Mozambique.</p> <p>Observers say the Islamic State group affiliations offer advantages to Africa-based militant groups and the umbrella organization. Local jihadist groups gain the cachet "of the Islamic State brand as well as the resources that come along it, such as financing, training, and a worldwide social media-based propaganda platform," wrote Jacob Zenn, of the Jamestown Foundation, and Colin P. Clarke, of the Soufan Group, for Foreign Policy. In turn, the Islamic State group can point to successes in Africa as it struggles to recover from defeats in the Middle East.</p> <p>In fact, African affiliates now are featured on the front page of the Islamic State group's weekly publication, al-Naba, more than core groups in Iraq and Syria, Zenn and Clarke reported.</p> <p>There are six African affiliates, or provinces, of the Islamic State group in Africa. The first three began in 2014 in war-torn Libya, Algeria and Egypt's troubled Sinai region. A year later, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) formed and has branches in the Lake Chad Basin and the Sahel. One branch emerged from Nigeria's Boko Haram insurgency and the other out of militant groups active in northern Mali.</p>

A small group in Somalia pledged allegiance to the Islamic State group in 2018, and a year later Islamic State Central Africa Province formed. It has branches in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province insurgency and in a faction of the eastern DRC's Allied Democratic Forces militant group.

"Underscoring how important an area of operations Africa has become for the Islamic State, an estimated 41 percent of all global deaths inflicted by Islamic State militants in 2019 occurred in Africa," researchers Tricia Bacon and Jason Warner for the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point wrote.

The African groups vary by history, size and motivation. Experts have found that discerning the true relationships between them and the so-called ISIS Core can be elusive. Ultimately, the Islamic State group has to designate a group as a province for it to be considered an affiliate.

Researchers Haroro J. Ingram and Lorenzo Vidino in a May 2021 essay for Lawfare, a blog of the Lawfare Institute, wrote that the Islamic State group supplies affiliates with its aqeeda (creed) and manhaj (method) for establishing an Islamic state and a brand for furthering its propaganda.

"In short, its affiliates are expected to adopt and apply the Islamic State's ideology and politico-military strategy in their corner of the world," they wrote.

For example, in the DRC, Seka Musa Baluku's faction of the Allied Democratic Forces militant group has adopted ISIS Core propaganda techniques and talking points. In turn, Ingram and Vidino wrote, the Islamic State group has acknowledged the DRC militants' operations and claimed its successes. ISIS Core doesn't seem to be doing much toward command and control, but there is evidence of funding coming to the DRC group.

One theme that unites the affiliates is their "mutual commitment to the ideals, at least ostensibly, of a global caliphate," according to Bacon and Warner.

In the way of aid to the Libyan group, ISIS Core sent emissaries from Iraq, returned foreign fighters to bolster local forces, offered money, and supplied governance, tactical and strategic advice.

ISIS Core also has sent money to ISWAP's Lake Chad faction and to groups in Somalia. Money and weapons went to the Sinai group, Bacon and Warner wrote. Even so, aid to affiliates was "ad hoc and infrequent."

Affiliation comes in three degrees, Zenn and Clarke argue. Libyan provinces, which are more or less defunct now, represented a first-degree connection because they pledged loyalty, took in fighters from Syria to establish themselves, and "maintained frequent and direct communications to the group's core." They also got funding, training and advice until international and Libyan forces dislodged them.

ISWAP would represent a second-tier connection. It has pledged loyalty but has had little engagement with fighters and trainers from the ISIS Core group. ISIS does, however, promote attacks and consult with ISWAP leaders.

Mozambique could be described as having a third-degree connection. Militants there pledged loyalty, but ISIS Core did not formally release those pledges. "Although a third-degree affiliation may not have led to the same harmonization as ISWAP has with the Islamic State, the benefits of its sponsorship have been seen in Mozambique, including strategy and tactics, media, and even down to uniform aesthetics," Zenn and Clarke wrote.

The world is taking note of the Islamic State group's growth in Africa. In late June 2021, leaders with the 83-nation Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS met in Rome and approved a task force to address the militant group's spread into Africa.

	<p>Luigi Di Maio, Italian minister of Foreign Affairs, did not share details about how the task force would work, but he said a “holistic approach” is needed to address poverty and other drivers of extremism.</p> <p>The coalition announced that the Central African Republic, the DRC and Mauritania are among the group’s newest members. Burkina Faso, Ghana and Mozambique attended as observers.</p> <p>“While it is good that the coalition is talking about Africa and bringing relevant countries into the discussion, any coordination seems to be still in the early stages, while the conditions on the ground are deteriorating very fast,” Emily Estelle, a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, told Voice of America.</p> <p>“The proposed task force should focus its energy on backing up military success with governance success,” she said. “This is the gap that lets IS and other groups keep coming back after military losses.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Nigeria: new IS West Africa leader killed
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/nigerian-army-says-islamic-state-west-africas-new-leader-killed-military-2021-10-28/
GIST	<p>ABUJA, Oct 28 (Reuters) - Nigeria's army said on Thursday it had killed the new leader of insurgent group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in a military operation this month, two weeks after announcing the death of the group's former head Abu Musab al-Barnawi.</p> <p>ISWAP is an offshoot of the Boko Haram insurgent group that has been fighting against the Nigerian armed forces for over a decade. The two militant groups later turned on each other.</p> <p>The conflict, which has spilled into neighbouring Chad and Cameroon, has left about 300,000 dead and millions dependent on aid, the United Nations says.</p> <p>Army spokesman Brigadier Benard Onyuko said in a statement that Nigerian troops had conducted several land and air raids on suspected insurgent locations, during which ISWAP's new leader, Malam Bako, was killed.</p> <p>"In the course of the operations within the period, a total of 38 terrorist elements were neutralized, including the ISWAP's new leader, Bako," Onyuko said without elaborating.</p> <p>Bako's death could not be independently verified, and there was no immediate confirmation from ISWAP.</p> <p>If confirmed, Bako would be the fourth leader of an Islamist insurgent group in West Africa to die this year, after Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau in May, Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) in August and al-Barnawi this month.</p> <p>Since Shekau's death, thousands of Boko Haram fighters have surrendered to the Nigerian armed forces.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Intel agencies failed predict Kabul collapse
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/four-u-s-intelligence-agencies-produced-extensive-reports-on-afghanistan-but-all-failed-to-predict-kabuls-rapid-collapse-11635415201?mod=hp_listb_pos1
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—Leading U.S. intelligence agencies failed to predict the rapid Taliban takeover of Afghanistan prior to the final withdrawal of American troops and instead offered scattershot assessments of the staying power of the Afghan military and government, a review of wide-ranging summaries of classified material by The Wall Street Journal shows.</p> <p>The nearly two dozen intelligence assessments from four different agencies haven’t been previously reported. The assessments charted Taliban advances from spring 2020 through this July, forecasting that</p>

the group would continue to gain ground and that the U.S.-backed government in Kabul was unlikely to survive absent U.S. support.

The analyses, however, differed over how long the Afghan government and military could hold on, the summaries show, with none foreseeing the group's lightning sweep into the Afghan capital by Aug. 15 while U.S. forces remained on the ground.

A month after President Biden announced his decision to withdraw all U.S. troops, for instance, the Central Intelligence Agency issued a May 17 report titled "Government at Risk of Collapse Following U.S. Withdrawal." The report estimated that the government of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani would fall by year's end, according to a summary.

Less than a month later, the agency issued another analysis titled: "Afghanistan: Assessing Prospects for a Complete Taliban Takeover Within Two Years," according to a summary.

A June 4 Defense Intelligence Agency report, meanwhile, said the Taliban would pursue an incremental strategy of isolating rural areas from Kabul over the next 12 months, according to a summary. In an "Executive Memorandum" on July 7, the DIA said the Afghan government would hold Kabul, according to a person familiar with the report.

The intelligence shortfalls underpinned some of the policy failures that resulted in chaotic mass civilian evacuations in the deadly final weeks of the U.S.'s 20-year Afghan war.

The summaries of the reports, which start in April 2020, provide the most detailed picture to date of what the U.S. intelligence community was telling Mr. Biden, and President Donald Trump before him, as each president sought to end the war that killed 2,400 U.S. military personnel and by some estimates cost more than \$2 trillion.

Policy makers across the national-security apparatus rely on such intelligence reports to shape their decisions and planning. While varied and conflicting assessments are common, the disparities may complicate efforts among decision makers to reach consensus. For the Afghan withdrawal, contingency planning, including the evacuation operations, relied heavily on the intelligence assessments, U.S. officials with knowledge of the policy planning said.

Members of Congress have been scrutinizing many aspects of the tumultuous exit from Afghanistan, including the performance of the intelligence community, after the administration was blindsided by the Taliban's rapid advance.

Assumptions that the Afghan security forces and government could hold out for some time were central to the administration's withdrawal plans. Those called for the U.S. military to draw down rapidly while the embassy remained well-staffed to provide visas and other support to Afghan allies weeks and months after American troops left.

When the Afghan government cratered, the U.S. military—much of which had left the country by August—reversed course, sending thousands of troops to evacuate the embassy and Afghans. In the ensuing rush, a suicide bombing and other violence killed scores more Afghans and 13 U.S. service members. Tens of thousands of Afghan allies and about 200 Americans were left behind.

The Journal reviewed titles, dates and summaries of reports from the CIA, the DIA, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the State Department's intelligence bureau. The documents represent a portion of the intelligence produced by those and other agencies on the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan.

Representatives of the CIA, the DIA, the State Department and the Office of Director of National Intelligence, which coordinates all U.S. intelligence agencies, declined to comment.

“Directionally, they were all correct that things were going to deteriorate,” a senior administration official said, while acknowledging that the agencies provided a “mixed picture.” “They’re not oracles,” he said.

Mr. Biden promised to withdraw from Afghanistan when he ran for president, and the U.S. officials with knowledge of the policy planning said the varying intelligence assessments had little impact on his decision to withdraw.

National security adviser Jake Sullivan said in August that the administration would conduct a “hotwash” of the withdrawal to determine “where we can do better, where we can find holes or weaknesses and plug them, as we go forward.”

An administration official said various agencies have begun or will soon begin their reviews.

CIA Director William Burns, among others, has defended the intelligence agencies’ overall performance while acknowledging that events unfolded faster than predicted.

“There’s a very sobering picture that we painted of some very troubling trend lines” in Afghanistan, he said at a Stanford University appearance last week. “So does that mean that we, with mathematical precision, can say that, you know, former President Ghani in Afghanistan is going to flee his office and not tell his senior-most aides on the 15th of August? No.”

Mr. Ghani fled the country as the Taliban entered Kabul.

Current and former officials said that intelligence agencies’ ability to track the course of the war outside Kabul eroded rapidly as U.S. troops began withdrawing from Afghanistan under Mr. Trump and closing far-flung bases used as collection platforms. That diminishing intelligence-collection capacity became a growing concern among lawmakers in the months leading up to the fall of Kabul, a Senate aide said.

“As you pull troops back, you’re not able to have collectors forward,” said Army Col. Thomas Spahr, who helped manage the drawdown of military intelligence assets in Afghanistan from summer 2019 to summer 2020. The CIA, he said, ceased to conduct annual district-by-district assessments in the country.

Sen. Mark Warner, the Virginia Democrat who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee, said that after reviewing intelligence reports leading up to the evacuation and holding classified hearings, “the intelligence was fundamentally accurate and on-point in predicting the trajectory of the Taliban takeover.” That a rapid withdrawal would be chaotic “should have come as no surprise,” he said in a statement.

Bill Roggio, a senior fellow who follows Afghanistan at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a hawkish think tank in Washington, said intelligence agencies and policy makers bear responsibility for being blindsided by the Taliban’s swift battlefield success.

Mr. Roggio said individual analysts at several agencies he was in touch with foresaw a rapid Taliban takeover, “and for whatever reason that didn’t make it to the top.”

“The intelligence community needs to take a long, hard look at how it provides assessments to senior leadership,” Mr. Roggio said. The White House, he said, seemed intent on the troop withdrawal.

After then-President Trump in February 2020 agreed with the Taliban to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan by May 2021, a CIA report warned that the U.S.-supported government in Kabul was unlikely to survive.

The April 13, 2020, report titled, “How Afghanistan Collapses After U.S. Pullout” came from the CIA’s “Red Cell,” whose mission is to conduct alternative assessments. It projected the demise of Mr. Ghani’s government once U.S. troops and funding were gone.

Another report, “Implications of Full US Troop Withdrawal,” was published on Dec. 14, 2020, by the National Intelligence Council, which conducts long-range strategic analysis for the Director of National Intelligence. The NIC foresaw a rapid Taliban takeover but said the group’s gains would accelerate after a U.S. troop withdrawal.

In April, Mr. Biden announced the full withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan no later than Sept. 11, 2021. Former CIA Deputy Director Michael Morell said that announcement—and not the departure of the last U.S. soldier in August—started the clock ticking on how long the Afghan government could survive.

“That’s when the psychology changed for everybody in Afghanistan,” he told an event at George Mason University’s Hayden Center in September. “It was the moment the Taliban knew it was going to win.”

Mr. Morell said: “Throughout the history of the 20 years, CIA was by far—by far—the most pessimistic agency about how the war was going.”

Intelligence from the CIA and DIA diverged in part, officials said, due to their differing missions. Overall, CIA assessments focused more on long-term and policy implications of the withdrawal, while the DIA, which serves the Pentagon, focused on military intelligence and tactical assessment and didn’t explore collapse scenarios, said an official familiar with the intelligence.

The senior administration official said the DIA “bought into some of the myths” about the capability of the Afghan military, which had been trained by the U.S.

In late April, DIA said that the Afghan National Defense and Security forces are “likely to hold Kabul while Taliban focuses elsewhere,” according to one summary. A week later, the agency raised the potential for the Afghan government to splinter but said it would keep control of Kabul.

A June 8 report noted the potential for Afghan security forces to collapse in key provinces, but still Kabul would hold.

The CIA, by contrast, consistently warned of potential collapse after a U.S. pullout, the summaries show. During the last year of the Trump administration, the CIA reported that it saw three different scenarios after a U.S. military withdrawal: a garrison state, where Mr. Ghani’s military would control Kabul and its environs; a divided country with the government and Taliban each controlling parts of Afghanistan; or a complete Taliban takeover.

By April 2021, the CIA was warning of isolated highways, which jeopardized the Afghan government’s tenuous grip on power, and that Afghanistan would pose a terrorism threat outside its borders once the U.S. exited.

A month later, the CIA predicted the government’s collapse without U.S. support, but saw that occurring a short time after the U.S. withdrawal.

Members of the Afghan government also foresaw a short time frame, according to a July 23, 2021, DIA report titled, “Afghanistan stability update - senior officials fear govt collapse.” The report said Afghan Vice President Amrullah Saleh thought his own government would fall in October, while the country’s foreign minister believed it would be in September.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Neo-Nazi duo jailed over attack plot
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/28/neo-nazi-the-base-far-right-us-prison-terms
GIST	Two neo-Nazi group members were sentenced on Thursday to nine years in prison each in a case that highlighted a broader federal crackdown on far-right extremists.

FBI agents arrested former Canadian armed forces reservist Patrik Jordan Mathews, US army veteran Brian Mark Lemley Jr and a third member of a group called The Base four days before a pro-gun rally in Virginia in January last year.

Surveillance equipment installed in their Delaware apartment captured Mathews and Lemley discussing an attack at the rally at Virginia's capitol in Richmond.

The judge who sentenced Mathews and Lemley to prison concluded that they intended to engage in terrorist activity. US district judge Theodore Chuang's decision to apply a "terrorism enhancement" to their sentences significantly increased their recommended prison terms under federal guidelines.

Chuang said recorded conversations between Mathews and Lemley captured the "virulence" and "passion" in their willingness to kill people and bring down the US government.

Mathews and Lemley pleaded guilty in June to gun charges in Maryland. They were not charged with any violent crimes, but prosecutors called them domestic terrorists.

The closed-circuit television camera and microphone in their apartment also captured Mathews and Lemley talk about breaking racist mass killer Dylann Roof out of prison where he is on death row, assassinating a Virginia lawmaker, destroying rail lines and power lines, derailing trains and poisoning water supplies, prosecutors said.

Mathews fled Canada after the Winnipeg Free Press published an article by an undercover reporter who met him under the guise of joining The Base. After crossing the border into the US, Mathews lived at a Georgia property where group members held military-style training camps.

"He was intent on violence. He was intent on murder," said assistant US attorney Thomas Windom.

Defense attorneys said the men never developed any specific plans for violence. And they argued that an undercover FBI agent who visited the Delaware apartment tried to pressure the two "damaged military veterans" into developing a plan for violence at the Virginia rally.

The Base and another white supremacist group called Atomwaffen Division have been leading proponents of "accelerationism", a fringe philosophy that advocates using mass violence to hasten society's collapse. A string of arrests dealt crippling blows to both groups.

The third co-defendant, William Garfield Bilbrough IV, was sentenced to five years in prison after pleading guilty in December to helping Mathews illegally enter the US from Canada in 2019.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Detainee describes torture CIA black sites
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/us/politics/quantanamo-detainee-torture.html
GIST	<p>GUANTÁNAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba — A suburban Baltimore high school graduate turned Al Qaeda courier, speaking to a military jury for the first time, gave a detailed account on Thursday of the brutal forced feedings, crude waterboarding and other physical and sexual abuse he endured during his 2003 to 2006 detention in the C.I.A.'s overseas prison network.</p> <p>Appearing in open court, Majid Khan, 41, became the first former prisoner of the black sites to openly describe, anywhere, the violent and cruel "enhanced interrogation techniques" that agents used to extract information and confessions from terrorism suspects.</p> <p>For more than two hours, he spoke about dungeonlike conditions, humiliating stretches of nudity with only a hood on his head, sometimes while his arms were chained in ways that made sleep impossible, and being intentionally nearly drowned in icy cold water in tubs at two sites, once while a C.I.A. interrogator counted down from 10 before water was poured into his nose and mouth.</p>

Soon after his capture in Pakistan in March 2003, Mr. Khan said, he cooperated with his captors, telling them everything he knew, with the hope of release. “Instead, the more I cooperated, the more I was tortured,” he said.

The dramatic accounting capped a day in which eight U.S. military officers were selected to serve on a jury, which will deliberate Friday on his official sentence in the range of 25 to 40 years, starting from his [guilty plea](#) in February 2012.

But the sentence is largely symbolic, a military commission requirement.

Unknown to the jurors, Mr. Khan and his lawyers [reached a secret deal](#) this year with a senior Pentagon official in which his actual sentence could end as early as February and no later than February 2025 because Mr. Khan had become a government cooperator upon pleading guilty.

Jurors were told that in 2012 Mr. Khan pleaded guilty to terrorism charges, including murder in violation of the law of war, for delivering \$50,000 of Al Qaeda money from Pakistan to an Al Qaeda affiliate in early 2003. The money was used in a deadly bombing of a Marriott hotel in August 2003, while Mr. Khan was a prisoner of the C.I.A. He has said he did not know how the money would be used.

He also admitted to plotting a number of other crimes with [Khalid Shaikh Mohammed](#), the accused mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks, notably by wearing a suicide vest in a failed effort in 2002 to assassinate the president of Pakistan at the time, Pervez Musharraf, a U.S. ally in the war on terrorism.

Sentencing was delayed for nearly a decade to give Mr. Khan time and opportunity to cooperate with federal and military prosecutors, so far behind the scenes, in federal and military terrorism cases. In the intervening years, prosecutors and defense lawyers clashed in court filings over [who would be called to testify about Mr. Khan’s abuse in C.I.A. custody](#), and how.

In court on Thursday, Mr. Khan read from a carefully worded 39-page account that did not identify C.I.A. agents or the countries and foreign intelligence agencies that had a role in his secret detention at black sites — information that is protected at the national security court. He expressed remorse for hurting people through his embrace of radical Islam and Al Qaeda, but also found a way around a labyrinth of U.S. intelligence classifications to realize a decade-long ambition to tell the world what U.S. agents had done to him.

“To those who tortured me, I forgive you,” he said, noting that while he was in custody he had rejected Al Qaeda, terrorism, “violence and hatred.”

“I hope in the day of judgment that Allah will do the same for you and for me. I ask forgiveness from those whom I have wronged and I have hurt.”

It was an emotional day for Mr. Khan. His father, Ali, and a sister, both U.S. citizens, sat behind the court in a gallery, seeing him in person for the first time since he left the United States and joined Al Qaeda after the Sept. 11 attacks. They were 50 feet from him and did not seem to recognize the now balding middle-age man with a gray goatee when he first entered the court.

After many minutes he caught their eyes, then waved. His father looked startled. Mr. Khan craned his neck frequently during the proceedings to see his family — and at one point formed a heart with his hands.

He juxtaposed his remarks of contrition with previously unheard details of what happened to him at the hands of the United States, the country his parents and siblings adopted by becoming citizens even as he did not.

His father wept through long stretches of the descriptions, at times hiding his head in his hands, while his sister, also tearful, tried to comfort him. The jury of Marine, Navy and Army officers watched and listened soberly, but displayed no emotion.

He received beatings while nude and spent long stretches in chains — at times shackled to a wall and crouching “like a dog,” he said, or with his arms extended high above his head and chained to a beam inside his cell. He was kept in darkness and dragged, hooded and shackled, his head slamming into floors, walls and stairs as he was moved between cells.

Before the C.I.A. moved him from one prison to another, he said, a medic inserted an enema and then put him in a diaper held in place by duct tape so he would not need a bathroom break during flights. Guards moving him would hood him, aside from the time he had his face duct taped.

While held in a Muslim country, he said, his captors allowed him to pray. But at times the Americans did not.

Earlier accounts released by his lawyers said he was so sleep deprived for a time that he began to hallucinate. He described the experience: images of a cow and a giant lizard advancing on him inside a cell while he was chained to a beam above his head. He tried to kick them away but lost his balance, causing his chains to jerk him.

Mr. Khan gained attention with the release of a 2014 study of the C.I.A. program by the Senate Intelligence Committee that said, after he refused to eat, his captors “infused” a puree of his lunch through his anus. The C.I.A. called it rectal refeeding. Mr. Khan called it rape.

The C.I.A. pumped water up the rectum of prisoners who would not follow a command to drink. Mr. Khan said this was done to him with “green garden hoses. They connected one end to the faucet, put the other in my rectum and they turned on the water.” He said he lost control of his bowels after those episodes and, to this day, has hemorrhoids.

He spoke about failed and sadistic responses to his hunger strikes and other acts of rebellion. Medics would roughly insert a feeding tube up his nose and down the back of his throat. He would try to bite it off and, in at least one instance, he said, a C.I.A. officer used a plunger to force food inside his stomach, a technique that caused stomach cramps and diarrhea.

The intelligence agency declined Thursday to comment on the descriptions offered in the hearing but noted that the C.I.A.’s detention and interrogation program ended in 2009.

Lawyers sought permission to bring Mr. Khan’s wife and daughter, who was born after his capture, to the court, but the commander of the military’s Southern Command, which oversees prison operations, opposed their attendance. Like Mr. Khan, who acquired permanent resident status as a boy in the United States but never became a U.S. citizen, his wife and daughter are citizens of Pakistan.

Mr. Khan began by telling the jury that he was born in Saudi Arabia and was raised in Pakistan, the youngest son of eight siblings, until his father acquired a gas station in Maryland and moved the family to the United States when he was 16. He went on to graduate from a high school in suburban Baltimore and was working for a telecommunications contractor that managed the Pentagon phone system at the time of the Sept. 11 attacks.

He described the attacks and the death of his mother months earlier in 2001 as a turning point in his life. Until then, he said, he had straddled two worlds: his traditional Pakistani family life and that of an American teenager who “smoked weed occasionally and had my share of girlfriends,” both of which he hid from his mother. After she died, he said, he was drawn to practicing Islam.

He rejected the explanation that Muslims had carried out the attack, “thinking that this was just another way the universe was kicking me while I was down, making me question my faith in Islam.”

	<p>During a family trip to Pakistan in 2002 — in which both he and his sister found spouses in arranged marriages — he encountered relatives, cousins and an uncle who had in earlier years joined the jihad in Afghanistan and had ties to Al Qaeda.</p> <p>“I was lost and vulnerable, and they went after me,” he said, including by showing him “propaganda videos” about the detention operation at Guantánamo, the base where he would be transferred for trial in 2006.</p> <p>“I went willingly to Al Qaeda,” he said. “I was stupid, so incredibly stupid. But they promised to relieve my pain and purify my sins. They promised to redeem me, and I believed them.”</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 British radical cleric exploits social media
SOURCE	https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2021/10/28/anjem-choudary-turns-to-alternative-social-media-channels-to-preach/
GIST	<p>British radical preacher Anjem Choudary, who was jailed for encouraging support for ISIS, has turned to alternative social media channels, such as Telegram, to continue preaching after Twitter and Facebook banned him.</p> <p>Choudary, 54, was released early from a five-and-a-half-year sentence from HMP Belmarsh in 2018, imposed after he used online lectures and messages to encourage support of ISIS.</p> <p>He was subjected to more than 20 conditions, which included a ban on public speaking, restricted internet and mobile phone use and a ban on contacting suspected extremists.</p> <p>When the UK lifted those restrictions in July, many mainstream platforms opted to ban him.</p> <p>However, researchers at think tank the Counter Extremism Project have discovered that he has turned to alternative sites.</p> <p>"He is once again using social media to spread his extremist messages," CEP said.</p> <p>"Despite being banned from Twitter and Facebook, Choudary has signed up for a plethora of other social media platforms on which to post ... diatribes calling for the creation of an Islamic caliphate ruled under Sharia law, all while boasting of how easily he rejoined social media.</p> <p>"Notably, Choudary has taken to the encrypted messaging app Telegram to disseminate essays and press releases to his hundreds of followers."</p> <p>Choudary led the Al Muhajiroun (ALM) network, which inspired terrorists including Usman Khan, who killed two people on London Bridge in 2019. Khan was on licence after being released early from a terrorism sentence for plotting to bomb the London Stock Exchange.</p> <p>This month it was reported that the man arrested on suspicion of murdering British MP David Amess, Ali Harbi Ali, had allegedly been radicalised by videos of Choudary.</p> <p>"Renewed public scrutiny has been placed on Choudary, his teachings and presence on social media", after the killing of British MP David Amess, CEP said.</p> <p>"Friends of the suspect ... Ali Harbi Ali, have made statements to authorities that Ali was radicalised in high school from watching YouTube videos of Choudary," the think tank said.</p> <p>"For years before his 2014 arrest, Choudary's Islamist speeches, anti-Western rhetoric, and declared support for foreign Islamist movements such as ISIS drew the attention of British authorities, who connected Choudary to multiple terrorist-related cases in the United Kingdom and Europe.</p>

	<p>"Choudary remains a dangerous and influential figure."</p> <p>Former ALM members who turned to terrorism include the leader of three attackers who killed eight people at London Bridge in 2017, and Khalid Masood, who murdered five people on Westminster Bridge that year.</p> <p>The group's influence is said to extend far beyond Britain. Those connected include Abu Hamza Al Masri, sentenced to life in the US in 2015 for terrorism-related offences.</p> <p>Other ALM members have been linked to terrorist attacks internationally and a quarter of jailed terrorists in the UK were also associated with the proscribed group.</p> <p>"CEP has documented 145 entities, 112 individuals, and 33 organisations with links to Choudary," the think tank said.</p> <p>"Of these 112 individuals, 19 successfully carried out terrorist attacks, 50 attempted to carry out a terrorist attack, and 38 are Islamist propagandists or recruiters."</p> <p>Choudary's influence in Europe has been such that the Dutch intelligence agency Avid accused him of being a prominent ISIS influencer in the Netherlands.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	10/29 Okinawa port clogged; tons floating pumice
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/okinawa-port-clogged-with-tons-of-floating-pumice/
GIST	<p>TOKYO – A large amount of pumice, apparently from the eruption of an undersea volcano, has washed ashore on the main island of Okinawa Prefecture and other places, affecting the fisheries industry and ship operations.</p> <p>About 10 tons of pumice are being removed every day at the fishing port of Hentona in the village of Kunigami, but the stones are said to have continued washing ashore at the port, seemingly without end.</p> <p>The prefectural government held the first meeting of an emergency response council Wednesday and confirmed its policy to start removing the pumice stones as soon as possible with help from a relevant national system.</p> <p>The pumice is believed to have been ejected from the Fukutokuokanoba submarine volcano near the Ogasawara Islands, which erupted in August. According to the prefectural government, pumice began washing ashore on Kita-Daitojima island early this month and have been confirmed throughout Okinawa Island as well.</p> <p>About 150 Indian mackerel, which were being raised in a cage at the fishing port, died after apparently swallowing pumice. A 24-year-old fisherman from the village said he is worried about how long the situation will continue, as he has been unable to fish for about a week. "I hope the prefecture will remove the stones as soon as possible," he said.</p> <p>About 750 fishing boats have been unable to leave port for fishing in the prefecture due to concerns about engine trouble. Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki said: "It is necessary for the prefecture to give complete priority to taking necessary measures. We would like to implement the measures with a sense of speed."</p> <p>According to an estimate by Toru Miyama, a senior researcher in ocean physics at the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology, pumice ejected from the Fukutokuokanoba submarine volcano was</p>

	<p>swept away mainly by the westward Kuroshio countercurrent and washed ashore in Okinawa Prefecture. Some of the stones then may be carried northward by the Kuroshio current and approach the Pacific side of the Shikoku region in early November, Miyama said.</p> <p>He said that due to the meandering of the current, the stones will pass about 500 kilometers off the Kii Peninsula, but may approach Shizuoka and Chiba prefectures by late November.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Pay-per-view autopsy event canceled
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/investigations/death-science-cadaver-dissection-class-canceled/281-1114b3b1-5a20-493e-86a5-99b972575b8c
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The organizer of a public, pay-per-view autopsy “class” scheduled for Halloween day in Seattle says the event has been canceled.</p> <p>“Unfortunately for Seattle and the north west (sic), team members have decided to cancel the event in your area,” said Jeremy Ciliberto, founder of DeathScience.org, in an email to KING 5 News.</p> <p>Ciliberto sold tickets for up to \$500 to the public to view in-person the autopsy and dissection of an actual human body. The event was scheduled to take place Sunday in a Marriott hotel conference room in Seattle.</p> <p>The cadaver lab is touring as part of the Oddities and Curiosities Expo, which travels across the country. It was the second in a series of pay-per-view autopsies that Ciliberto had planned to bring to paying customers.</p> <p>Reaction to the first show, which took place in a Marriott hotel in Portland on Oct. 17, sparked questions from the authorities and the KING 5 Investigators and led to the cancellation in Seattle.</p> <p>“We feel that this was not respectful and certainly not ethical,” said Kimberly DiLeo, the chief medical death investigator for the Multnomah County, Oregon Medical Examiner.</p> <p>A photojournalist from KING 5 attended the Portland show, and it was exactly as advertised.</p> <p>Paying customers filed into a lower floor ballroom at the Marriott Downtown Waterfront hotel. On a table in the center of the ballroom, a figure lay draped in a white sheet. The VIP customers, who paid the \$500 ticket price, sat in the front row inches from the table.</p> <p>Dr. Colin Henderson, a retired professor of anatomy from the University of Montana in Missoula, removed the covering and exposed the body of an 86-year-old dead man that Henderson said “...had donated his body to science.”</p> <p>Henderson drew a surgical knife and over the course of the next several hours cut into the chest cavity, head and limbs of the corpse. He removed various organs and the brain, explaining to the audience that this was the same type of procedure that he had taught to students during his college career.</p> <p>“It was very educational,” said one attendee named Monica. “It was very respectful to the person that donated their body.”</p> <p>“They’re not doing anything that I would, if it was my own family member, be upset about,” said Christine, a Portland resident, who attended the show.</p> <p>Ciliberto of DeathScience.org called it “an educational event” that “allows the students to explore the body in a much more intimate way” and de-stigmatizes death, according to Ciliberto, who is also a TikTok host with a million followers, podcaster and artist whose works are created with replica human bones.</p> <p>“This is not a sideshow,” Ciliberto said. “This is very professional.”</p>

But the event also raises many questions that the KING 5 Investigators sought to answer about ethics, the firms known as “body brokers” and whether the body donor or his family gave consent to the public, for-profit dissection of his corpse.

The cadavers come from [Med Ed Labs](#), a Las Vegas-based, for-profit company that accepts donations of human bodies for “...medical and surgical research, education, and training.” In exchange for the donation, surviving family members receive their loved one’s cremated remains and avoid the cost of a burial.

Ciliberto said that he pays Med Ed “north” of \$10,000 – he wouldn’t say exactly how much – for each human cadaver.

Ciliberto said Med Ed was aware of his plans for the corpses he purchased and obtained the proper consent. But DiLeo, the chief death investigator based in Portland, said a Med Ed supervisor told her that was not the case.

“Their supervisor was unaware of the deceased being used for this event,” DiLeo said.

That means the donor may not have known that his body would be used in a public, for-profit manner.

Ciliberto said in a later email that donor consent was not his responsibility.

“Any concerns about the cadaver have always been addressed by the lab,” Ciliberto wrote. “Again I am not the lab, I am the host.”

DiLeo said her office is attempting to locate the next-of-kin of the man whose body was dissected in Portland.

KING 5’s photojournalist at the cadaver show noted a medical-type bracelet on the man’s wrist with the name David Saunders typed on it. A search of nationwide death records and obituary websites did not turn up any solid leads on the death of an 86-year-old David Saunders. The medical examiner’s office estimates that he died within the last three to six months, based on images from the cadaver lab.

Before the Portland show on Oct. 17, DiLeo convinced the Downtown Courtyard Marriott to cancel the cadaver class.

“(The Marriott was) initially told that the event was for medical equipment training and once they found out and discovered the website, (the manager) immediately canceled the event,” said DiLeo.

But Ciliberto quickly moved to the nearby Marriott Downtown Waterfront, which DiLeo said refused to cancel when she contacted management there.

“We follow detailed protocols to protect safety...,” said General Manager Martin McAllister in a written statement. “We are aware of concerns regarding a recent event and we are looking into them further, but as a matter of privacy, we do not discuss details of guests or groups.”

Med Ed Labs did not answer KING 5’s questions. Professor Colin Henderson, who performed the procedure in Portland, referred questions to Ciliberto, saying that he was simply hired to conduct the forensic dissection.

“We need to have a law in place where this doesn’t happen again,” said DiLeo.

However, in an interview with KING 5, Ciliberto said he has no regrets about his Portland show and he plans more pay-per-view autopsies.

	“We’re looking at more locations across the United States in 2022,” he said.
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HEADLINE	10/28 Destructive pest in Okanogan County?
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/destructive-pest-possibly-seen-in-north-central-washington
GIST	<p>OMAK, Wash. - The Washington State Department of Agriculture is asking the public to watch for spotted lanternflies after one was possibly seen near Omak, Washington.</p> <p>Spotted lanternflies are native to Asia and primarily attack grapes, but have been found in other crops such as hops, apples, peach, and other fruit trees.</p> <p>Last week, the Washington Invasive Species Council received information on the possible sighting and informed the WSDA.</p> <p>State entomologists searched the area but were unable to find the bug. They are asking the public, especially those in Okanogan County, to examine their trees and other outdoor surfaces for spotted lanternfly adults and egg masses.</p> <p>“Our search revealed abundant host material in the area,” Sven Spichiger, WSDA managing entomologist said. “For the next several weeks, we ask people to look for both adults and egg masses. If they think they found any suspected life stage of the pest, they should report it.”</p> <p>When reporting a possible sighting, include a photograph, date, and location of the sighting and most importantly -- collect the specimens. Reports can be made by emailing WSDA at pestprogram@agr.wa.gov or calling 1-800-443-6684. After reporting, suspect specimens and egg masses can be taken to WSU Extension offices.</p> <p>Spotted lanternfly first arrived in the U.S. in 2014 in Pennsylvania.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 First a drought, now ski resorts open early
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2021/10/28/early-ski-season-tahoe-snowfall-atmospheric-river/
GIST	<p>It’s time for some trick-or-treating on the slopes.</p> <p>At least two ski resorts in northern California announced they will kick off an early season starting Friday, weeks ahead of schedule, after a major storm dumped feet of snow at higher elevations.</p> <p>Palisades Tahoe said this week that it would open up its season on Friday, nearly a month ahead of schedule, after getting more than three feet of snow at upper elevations and 1½ feet at its base in recent days. It’s only the third time in the resort’s 72-year history that it has opened in October — the last time was in 2004.</p> <p>Mammoth Mountain ski resort, about 140 miles south of the Lake Tahoe area, will also open on Friday, it announced earlier this month — two weeks ahead of schedule. The resort, which said this week that it got more than three feet of snow at its summit, has only opened in October 10 times in history, according to spokeswoman Lauren Burke.</p> <p>The news of an early ski season comes as California, having already contended with historic drought conditions and record wildfires this year, experienced a weather event called an “atmospheric river” in recent days. The event brought a heavy rainfall — at least one city, Sacramento, experienced its wettest day on record. The weather helped quell the state’s fire season, causing flooding and mudslides in some areas — and also brought some welcome news for recreation at higher elevations, as well as local reservoirs.</p>

Water levels on Lake Tahoe, near Tahoe City, rose almost half a foot and pushed the lake back above its natural rim, after dipping an inch below it last week. Located about two hours west and at the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, Folsom Lake rose more than 12 feet. Water levels at Lake Oroville, California's second-largest reservoir, increased by 26 feet.

Despite the bumps, most of the state's reservoirs are still under their historical average and far from [capacity](#), but it provides a good start to the wet season.

"Any weather news in this area has not been good for the past few months — we've been in a drought, we've had a lot of wildfires, the [Caldor Fire](#) came within the Tahoe basin," said Alex Spychalsky, a spokeswoman for Palisades Tahoe. "So it's exciting for us to have some good news to focus on."

For now, that good news means a pre-Halloween weekend opportunity to hit the slopes. Mammoth Mountain is hosting a costume contest this weekend, according to a [post](#) on Facebook. And at Palisades Tahoe, Spychalsky said they'll be handing out candy to those who are dressed up.

The early start this year is a reminder that even if climate change will mean later ski seasons long-term, "we should expect some years where we get enough snow dropped by these kind of amped-up storms," said Matthew Igel, an assistant adjunct professor of meteorology at the University of California at Davis.

"As a result of global warming, overall we expect warming and we expect less precipitation this time of year — but weather is complicated and highly variable," he said.

Benjamin Hatchett, a professor of atmospheric science at the Desert Research Institute in Reno, Nev., said these kinds of back-to-back extreme weather events are "par for the course."

"These are all things we expect in a warming climate," he said, "where you have heat and drought followed by wildfire, followed by more heat and drought and then extreme precipitation."

In the long term, perhaps a few decades in the future, Hatchett said continued warming means snowfall will be limited to the very highest elevations.

All the more reason to enjoy the snow now.

"That's my suggestion for skiing — for any kind of outdoor recreation. In an event-based sense, yes, you should probably go ski because who knows, it may not snow again this year," he said. "But at a larger scale, with all the dramatic changes, wildfire and other disturbances we're seeing, it's really important to go out and do things and see the places you really like. Because in a mere matter of minutes, they change forever."

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HEADLINE	10/28 PETA urges MLB change 'bullpen' name
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/oct/28/peta-urges-mlb-change-bullpen-more-animal-friendly/
GIST	<p>This one probably won't catch on.</p> <p>The People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) caused a stir online Thursday for suggesting the baseball term "bullpen" was offensive to animals.</p> <p>PETA, which has a reputation for starting online discussions regarding animal safety, tweeted that "bullpen" — where pitchers warm up — should be changed to the more animal-friendly "arm barn."</p> <p>"'Bullpen' refers to the area of a 'bull's pen' where bulls are held before they are slaughtered — it's a word with speciesist roots and we can do better than that," reads the tweet that was largely mocked online with nearly 7,000 replies and only 400 likes as of 6 p.m.</p>

	<p>The name on PETA's Twitter account now reads "Arm Barn."</p> <p>Tracy Reiman, PETA's executive vice president, said in a news release that "bullpens devalue talented players and mock the misery of sensitive animals."</p> <p>"PETA encourages Major League Baseball coaches, announcers, players, and fans to changeup their language and embrace the 'arm barn' instead," Reiman said.</p> <p>The animal rights group has previously called for sports programs to ban live animal mascots and called on Cleveland to add a vegan option to its hot dog race during games at Progressive Field.</p> <p>However, PETA did not take public stances on baseball terms "ducks on the pond," "gopher ball" or "worm burner." At least, not yet.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 AGs Halloween warning: cannabis edibles
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/halloween-candy-snacks-cannabis-edibles-warning/
GIST	<p>Attorneys general in several states issued warnings this week about cannabis products that look like normal snacks and candy. The warnings come amid a national trend of children accidentally consuming them and just days before Halloween.</p> <p>"These look-alike cannabis products are unregulated, unsafe, and illegal," Connecticut Attorney General William Tong said in a statement. "Accidental cannabis overdoses by children are increasing nationwide, and these products will only make this worse."</p> <p>Tong cited a report from the American Association of Poison Control which said poison control hotlines received about 2,622 calls for young children who consumed cannabis products in the first half of 2021. And in the first nine months of 2020, 80% of calls to the Poison Control Center were related to pediatric exposure to marijuana edibles.</p> <p>New York Attorney General Letitia James said the cannabis edibles are "deceptively designed" to resemble standard treats. Instead, they contain high levels of cannabis and tetrahydrocannabinol, also known as THC, which is the main compound found in marijuana.</p> <p>"Accidental cannabis overdoses by children are increasing nationwide, and these look-alike products will only exacerbate the danger by appealing to children and youth," said Kwame Raoul, the Illinois attorney general.</p> <p>Connecticut, New York and Illinois have legalized the adult recreational use of certain amounts of cannabis. Under Connecticut law, cannabis products cannot be sold under a brand name that is identical to or similar to an existing non-cannabis product. A single adult serving size for cannabis edibles under the state statute contains five milligrams of THC, and a multiple-serving package for cannabis edibles cannot contain more than 100 milligrams of total THC.</p> <p>The state attorneys general allege some of the replicate snacks containing cannabis exceed even the maximum legal adult serving. "If a child were to eat the entire bag, he or she would be consuming 120 times the maximum legal adult serving," Tong said in reference to a cannabis snack that resembled Cheetos and contained 600 milligrams of THC.</p> <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says edibles containing marijuana have a greater risk of poisoning people and can lead to serious injury, cause longer-lasting intoxicating effects and be unpredictable. THC from edibles can make children children "very sick," and in certain instances require emergency room visits or hospitalization, the agency said.</p>

	<p>In Ohio, Attorney General Dave Yost said those responsible for dispersing the illegal edibles in proximity to children "should reconsider how they choose to make profits." Marijuana can only legally be sold in Ohio for medical reasons.</p> <p>Despite the timing of the warnings, some experts say it's unlikely that these cannabis products will end up in children's treat-or-treat baskets. One reason: the high cost of cannabis edibles.</p> <p>"From an economics perspective, it makes absolutely no sense that someone would go out there and spend hundreds and hundreds of dollars on marijuana edibles just to give them to kids who then walk away and they never see again," Erik Altieri, executive director of the advocacy group NORML, told CBS affiliate KYTX.</p>
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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	10/28 Arrests: cutting cedar wood from bridge
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/two-men-arrested-for-cutting-cedar-wood-from-bridge-state-officials-say
GIST	<p>JEFFERSON COUNTY, Wash. - Two men were arrested after they were reportedly caught cutting cedar wood from the base of a bridge, state officials say.</p> <p>The Department of Natural Resources says two men were hunting in DNR's Clearwater block in Jefferson County when they heard chainsaws. An officer with the department went out to investigate and found the two men reportedly using a chainsaw to cut chunks of cedar wood from the bridge.</p> <p>DNR says the two men were arrested and booked into Jefferson County Jail on felony charges.</p> <p>According to the department, the cedar wood can be sold on the black market for wood mills to turn into shake and shingles.</p> <p>A lock blocking access to the area had been broken.</p> <p>DNR crews are now inspecting the bridge to ensure it is safe.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Amid Petito, Laundrie search: more bodies
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/amid-gabby-petito-brian-laundrie-search-6-additional-bodies-unearthed
GIST	<p>Amid the search for Gabby Petito and Brian Laundrie, law enforcement agencies across the country discovered six additional bodies.</p> <p>A nationwide search commenced following the disappearance of Petito and her fiancé, Laundrie, and law enforcement across the country believe the attention Petito's case received helped with finding the remains of at least six additional missing individuals.</p> <p>Petito, 22, and Laundrie, 23, were on a cross-country road trip in a converted camper van when she suddenly disappeared.</p> <p>Petito had last been in contact with her family in late August when she and Laundrie were visiting Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. Their social media posts documenting the trip stopped abruptly and Laundrie returned to their Florida home in the van — alone, according to investigators.</p> <p>It was later found that Laundrie's family had not seen him since Sept. 14 and a nationwide search ensued.</p>

On Sept. 19, the remains of Petito were found at Bridger-Teton National Forest, north of Jackson Hole, Wyoming and the search for her fiancé ramped up with tips being called in about alleged sightings of Laundrie across the country. Petito's death was ruled as a homicide and her cause of death was by strangulation, according to the autopsy report.

On Oct. 21, the FBI confirmed that human remains found at a Florida park were that of Brian Laundrie, the [only person of interest](#) in [Petito's](#) case.

The [FBI Denver field office confirmed](#) that dental records were used to match what North Port police referred to as "bones" found at the Myakkahatchee Creek Environmental Park in North Port.

Amid the search for Laundrie, at least six additional bodies were found of missing individuals across the country.

Alabama

Earlier sightings in September had Laundrie in Mobile, Alabama, according to local news media. Investigators were chasing down dozens of tips from people who believed they saw Laundrie or someone who looked a lot like him in the area, according to FOX10 News.

To add fuel to the fire, a body was found in a dumpster next to a Walmart in Tillman's Corner, a suburb of Mobile. Many speculated that the body was Laundrie's, but [police later revealed](#) the body was identified as a homeless man, according to FOX10 News.

Utah

In August, newlywed couple Kylen Schulte, 24, and Crystal Turner, 38, were found shot to death near Moab in the South Mesa area of the La Sal Mountains.

While the discovery of Schulte and Turner's bodies happened before Petito's body was discovered, it was speculated that the incidents were connected.

However, investigators later revealed neither case was connected and the search for Petito and Laundrie resumed.

"It has been determined that the Gabby Petito missing person case is not related to the double-homicide case involving Crystal Turner and Kylen Schulte," Grand County Sheriff Steven White said in a [statement on Sept. 18](#).

Wyoming

On Sept. 28, teams with Teton Search and Rescue discovered a body at the base of Teton Pass in Wyoming.

In the frantic search for Petito following her suspicious disappearance on Aug. 27, rescuers were able to find the body of Robert "Bob" Lowery, 46, of Houston, Texas.

Lowery died by suicide from a gunshot wound to the head, according to the [Teton County coroner](#).

"The widespread news coverage of the Gabby Petito search helped bring light to Lowery's case, and resulted in at least two members of the public calling local authorities this past weekend with new information about his possible last seen point," officials said following the discovery of Lowery's body.

The body of another [missing Texas man](#) was recovered on Oct. 24 in Grand Teton National Park—the same park where the body of Petito was located last month.

Jared Hembree's body was located near Uhl Hill in the eastern part of the park after a search that included more than 80 personnel. His vehicle was located at the Game Warden Point parking area in the eastern part of Grand Teton.

California

Following the nationwide search for Petito, interest reignited for a case out of California where 30-year-old Lauren Cho disappeared in the Yucca Valley area two months ago.

Cho was last seen on June 28 when she walked away from a rental property in the 8600 block of Brenmar Trail, according to the [San Bernadino County Sheriff's Department](#).

On Oct. 9, human remains were located in the rugged terrain of the open desert and were positively identified as Cho, according to the [San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department](#).

North Carolina

In early October, several reports started emerging of witnesses who believed they saw Laundrie on the Appalachian Trail near the North Carolina and Tennessee border.

Dennis Davis, who spoke to a number of news outlets on Oct. 2, including Fox News Digital twice, said it didn't at first register that the driver may have been Laundrie, but after the encounter, he looked up photos of the fugitive wanted on debit card fraud charges, and he then felt convinced enough to call in the sighting to the FBI twice, as well as 911 operators in Tennessee and North Carolina.

"There is no doubt about it. That was Brian Laundrie I was just talking to. 100%. Not a doubt in my mind," Davis said of the encounter after he looked up both a portrait and profile shot of Laundrie on his phone.

Meanwhile, on Oct. 9, National Park Service rangers located a body on the Blue Ridge Parkway, according to [local news media](#). The body was identified as 33-year-old Joshua Calderon and his death is being investigated as a homicide.

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HEADLINE	10/28 Tacoma police: serial arsonist arrested
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article255372961.html
GIST	<p>A suspect was arrested Thursday for Sunday's fire at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Parish.</p> <p>Tacoma Police say he's a serial arsonist.</p> <p>Tacoma Police spokeswoman Wendy Haddow said the 20-year-old man allegedly caused six fires October 23-25 in Tacoma.</p> <p>Those include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">— A fire in the 5900 block of South 12th Street at 1 a.m. Debris was set on fire, resulting in damage to a condo's garage.— A fire reported around 4:30 a.m. Sunday that caused significant damage to St. Charles.— A fire in the 600 block of South Mildred Street just before midnight. The fire burned an exterior door. Haddow did not have details on the other three fires. <p>The suspect was booked into the Pierce County Jail on two counts of first degree arson and four counts of second degree arson.</p> <p>The arrest comes two days after another suspect was arrested for the Oct. 11 arson at the Islamic Center of Tacoma in University Place.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Flight attendant broken bones in attack
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SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2021/10/28/american-airlines-flight-attendant-attack/
GIST	<p>A flight attendant for American Airlines suffered broken bones in her face and had to be hospitalized after a passenger allegedly attacked her Wednesday in an incident the company's chief executive called "one of the worst displays of unruly behavior we've ever witnessed."</p> <p>The incident occurred on a flight from New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport to John Wayne Airport in Orange County, Calif. It prompted the pilots to divert the flight to Denver, where the passenger was detained.</p> <p>The flight attendant apparently bumped the passenger while moving through the first-class cabin, according to Julie Hedrick, president of the Association of Professional Flight Attendants, which represents those who fly for American Airlines. The flight attendant apologized, but the passenger left his seat, confronted her as she stood in the aircraft's galley, then punched her in the face, Hedrick said.</p> <p>Hedrick said the flight attendant was taken to a hospital for treatment of broken bones in her face. She was later released.</p> <p>The incident echoed one from earlier this year in which a Southwest Airlines flight attendant lost several teeth after a passenger allegedly punched her in the face. The attacks come on the heels of an increase in incidents in which passengers have shouted obscenities, pushed and shoved flight attendants, harassed other passengers or even attempted to open the cockpit door.</p> <p>Hedrick said problem passengers are not a new phenomenon, but recent incidents have put flight attendants increasingly on edge. The Federal Aviation Administration, which is charged with enforcing rules on airplanes, has seen a sixfold increase over two years in its investigations of unruly passengers.</p> <p>"We've never had passengers assault us like this," Hedrick said. "I think for flight attendants going to work today, the mental exhaustion of 'what am I going to be dealing with?' — you just don't know what's going to happen on your flight today."</p> <p>Hedrick said the number of incidents involving unruly passengers has declined from peaks during the summer. Even so, she said, "it doesn't matter when something like this happens."</p> <p>In a strongly worded video message on Instagram, American Airlines chief executive Doug Parker said the carrier would push to have the passenger "prosecuted to the fullest extent possible." He said the person would be banned from traveling on American.</p> <p>"This type of behavior has to stop," Parker said, adding that the airline also is working with the FAA, which is authorized to levy fines of up to \$50,000 in such incidents.</p> <p>The number of airline passengers cited for what the FAA terms "unruly behavior" has skyrocketed during the coronavirus pandemic. Some of the confrontations are fueled by disagreements over federal requirements that passengers wear masks when boarding aircraft. According to the FAA, of nearly 5,000 reports of unruly behavior this year, more than 3,500 involve disputes over masks. Others have involved alcohol, prompting some airlines to temporarily suspend sales.</p> <p>In January, the agency implemented a "zero-tolerance" policy for bad behavior on flights. According to its most recent figures, the FAA is investigating 923 incidents and has begun enforcement action in 216 of those. In 2019, when record numbers of people were traveling, the FAA investigated 146 cases of unruly behavior among passengers.</p> <p>A Southwest flight attendant lost two teeth after being assaulted on a flight. The passenger was arrested.</p> <p>Hedrick said there is no indication that the incident on Wednesday involved a dispute over masks. She said it also is not clear whether alcohol may have been a factor. American is among several carriers that have limited alcohol sales on domestic flights. The carrier does offer alcohol in its first-class cabins.</p>

Denver International Airport officials referred calls to the local office of the FBI, which is looking into the incident. In his video message, Parker said the passenger had been arrested. The FBI office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Hedrick said the union also is looking into an incident that occurred Wednesday in Honolulu. During the incident, a passenger allegedly spit at and slapped a flight attendant while exiting an airplane.

She said her union and others continue to push for a federal “no-fly” list that would bar such passengers from flying. Airlines maintain their own “no-fly” lists, but those are not shared among carriers. Hedrick said aviation workers also are pushing for increased police presence and more follow-up on what happens to passengers who are arrested.

“It’s not just the masks,” Hedrick said. “Our passengers have changed. Their behavior on our flights, the safety of our flight attendants, the safety of our passengers — every day is being threatened here.”

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HEADLINE	10/28 Lawyers cite CIA plot to harm Assange
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/oct/28/assange-extradition-appeal-lawyers-cite-new-claims-of-cia-plot-to-harm-him
GIST	<p>Lawyers for Julian Assange have cited new allegations that the CIA plotted to kidnap or kill him as “grounds for fearing what will be done to him” if he is extradited to the US to face espionage charges.</p> <p>The WikiLeaks founder’s legal team also described diplomatic assurances given by US authorities in an effort to overturn a ruling earlier this year against his extradition as meaningless, and not enough to overcome concerns about his risk of suicide were he to be sent to the US.</p> <p>On the first day of an appeal against the ruling on Wednesday, a lawyer for the US said authorities had promised that Assange would not be held before trial in a top-security “supermax” prison and could also serve a sentence in his native Australia if convicted.</p> <p>Edward Fitzgerald QC, for Assange, said his client was too mentally ill to be extradited, that the US assurances did not remove the risk of him being detained in extreme isolation in the long term, and the risk of suicide remained substantial.</p> <p>Assange would be put into isolation on arrival in the US, he said. “This is not some distant fact. This is going to happen as soon as he arrives in America.”</p> <p>Assange is being held in Belmarsh Prison and appeared only by video link on the first day of the two-day hearing.</p> <p>Lawyers for the US authorities hope to overturn a January ruling by a district judge, Vanessa Baraitser, that Assange could not be extradited, which cited a real and “oppressive” risk of suicide.</p> <p>They contend Baraitser was misled by a psychiatrist who testified about Assange’s fragile mental state but did not include the fact that he had fathered two children in the UK.</p> <p>In written legal argument, Assange’s lawyers said there were “unique and special reasons” that led to Prof Michael Kopelman’s understandable caution about the identification of Stella Moris as Assange’s partner.</p> <p>This arose from claims, aired during proceedings last year, about a plan to poison or kidnap Assange from the Ecuadorian embassy and even steal a nappy from one of his sons to gather DNA.</p>

	<p>Recent reports after an investigation by Yahoo News that CIA officials had discussed plans to harm Assange also justified Kopelman's claims, according to Assange's team.</p> <p>"There are great grounds for fearing what will be done to him given the revelations of surveillance in the embassy and plots to kill him," Fitzgerald told the court.</p> <p>Prosecutors in the US have indicted Assange on 17 espionage charges and one charge of computer misuse over WikiLeaks' publication of thousands of leaked military and diplomatic documents. They carry a maximum sentence of 175 years in prison.</p> <p>A lawyer for the US said on Wednesday, however, that the sentence could be much shorter. The longest sentence given for equivalent offending had been 63 months, Jame Lewis said.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 DOJ settlement Charleston church shooting
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/oct/28/charleston-church-shooting-justice-department-settlement
GIST	<p>The families of nine people who died in a 2015 racist mass shooting at a Black South Carolina church have reached a settlement with the justice department in a lawsuit that accused federal agencies of a faulty background check that allowed the white supremacist killer Dylann Roof to purchase a gun.</p> <p>The justice department will pay \$88m, which includes \$63m for the victims' families as well as \$25m for five survivors who were injured at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston, South Carolina. Roof wanted to start a race war by targeting the 200-year-old historically Black congregation.</p> <p>"The department is pleased to bring closure to this long-running litigation," said Brian M Boynton, acting assistant attorney general of the justice department's civil division. "These settlement agreements represent another chapter in the justice system's efforts to address this horrific event, following the government's prosecution and conviction of the shooter for federal hate crimes."</p> <p>Survivors and the victims' families filed the lawsuit in 2016, arguing that federal negligence allowed Roof to buy the .45-caliber handgun he used during the shooting. The Lexington county sheriff, Jay Koon, said a jail clerk entered incorrect information for Roof's February 2015 drug arrest, and that while the mistake was noticed within days, it was not fixed in a state database.</p> <p>As a result, when Roof attempted to purchase the gun two months later, an FBI examiner spotted the arrest but called the incorrect agency to obtain his record. Without the necessary documents, the purchase had to go through.</p> <p>According to local attorney Andy Savage, who represents some members of the group, survivors are satisfied with the settlement.</p> <p>In a statement sent to NPR, Savage said: "The funds made available to these families will help accommodate their material needs, but the depth of their loss of cherished loved ones, and the continued mental anguish caused by their vivid memories of helplessly watching the racist slaughter of family and friends, cannot be assuaged by money alone.</p> <p>"It is their hope that their experience will help to focus those in leadership positions on the plight of the daily trauma suffered by an untold number of victims of gun violence. To do nothing is to continue to accept racial violence and wanton massacres as an integral part of the American experience," Savage added.</p> <p>In 2017, Roof was sentenced to death after being convicted of 33 federal charges, including murder and hate crimes. He is the first person to face execution for a federal hate crime conviction.</p>

	Last year, Roof appealed against his convictions and death sentence, arguing that he was suffering from a wide variety of psychological disorders including schizophrenia when he represented himself at his capital trial.
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HEADLINE	10/28 US returns stolen antiquities to India
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/oct/28/us-returns-stolen-antiquities-to-india-in-art-sche/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) – U.S. authorities returned about 250 antiquities to India on Thursday in a long-running investigation of a stolen art scheme.</p> <p>The items, worth an estimated \$15 million, were handed over during a ceremony at the Indian Consulate in New York City. The centerpiece is a bronze Shiva Nataraja valued at \$4 million, authorities said.</p> <p>The ceremony stems from a sprawling probe by the Manhattan district attorney’s office and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. The investigation has focused on tens of thousands of antiquities allegedly smuggled into the United States by dealer Subhash Kapoor, who has denied the allegations.</p> <p>The case “serves as a potent reminder that individuals who maraud sacred temples in pursuit of individual profit are committing crimes not only against a country’s heritage but also it’s present and future,” District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. said in a statement.</p> <p>Authorities say Kapoor - jailed in India and facing charges there pending a U.S. extradition request - used his Arts of the Past gallery in New York to traffic looted treasures from India and various countries in Southeast Asia. The investigation has resulted in the recovery of 2,500 artifacts valued at \$143 million and convictions of six Kapoor co-conspirators, Vance said.</p> <p>The Shiva Nataraja bronze was sold by the mother of Nancy Wiener, a gallery operator who pleaded guilty in the case this month to charges of conspiracy and possession of stolen property, authorities said. Nancy Wiener sold looted items to major museums in Australia and Singapore, they said.</p> <p>In June, the district attorney’s office returned more than two dozen artifacts worth \$3.8 million to Cambodia as part of the investigation. Another 33 objects were sent back to Afghanistan in April.</p> <p>Court papers filed in New York says Kapoor went to extraordinary lengths to acquire the artifacts, many of them statues of Hindu deities, and then falsified their provenance with forged documents. They say Kapoor traveled the world seeking out antiquities that had been looted from temples, homes and archaeological sites. Some of the artifacts were recovered from Kapoor’s storage units in New York.</p> <p>Kapoor had the items cleansed and repaired to remove any damage from illegal excavation, and then illegally exported them to the United States from their countries of origin, according to U.S. prosecutors.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Oklahoma execution does not go smoothly
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/28/us/politics/supreme-court-oklahoma-executions.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Thursday lifted a stay of execution that a federal appeals court had granted to two Oklahoma death row inmates, clearing the way for the men to be put to death by lethal injection.</p> <p>One of them, John Marion Grant, who was convicted of murdering a prison cafeteria worker in 1998, was executed on Thursday, a few hours after the Supreme Court ruled.</p> <p>Like other executions in the state, this one — the first in six years — did not go smoothly, The Associated Press reported. Mr. Grant, who was strapped to a gurney, convulsed and vomited as the first chemical, a sedative, was administered. After several minutes of this, members of the execution team wiped vomit from his face and neck.</p>

The Oklahoma Department of Corrections said the execution was carried out in accordance with protocols and “without complication.”

Mr. Grant and the other inmate, Julius Jones, had argued that the state’s lethal injection protocol, which uses three chemicals, could subject them to excruciating pain.

They also objected on religious grounds to a requirement imposed by a trial judge that they choose among proposed alternative methods of execution, saying that doing so would amount to suicide.

As is the court’s custom, its brief order gave no reasons. The three more liberal members of the court — Justices Stephen G. Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan — dissented, also without providing reasons. Justice Neil M. Gorsuch did not participate in the case, presumably because he had considered an aspect of it when he was a federal appeals court judge.

Mr. Jones, who was convicted of killing a man in 1999 in front of the man’s sister and daughters during a carjacking, is set to be put to death on Nov. 18.

The Supreme Court has been skeptical of challenges to lethal injection protocols and requires inmates to demonstrate that they would be subjected to “a substantial risk of severe pain.” Inmates challenging a protocol must also propose an alternative.

“A prisoner must show a feasible and readily implemented alternative method of execution that would significantly reduce a substantial risk of severe pain and that the state has refused to adopt without a legitimate penological reason,” Justice Gorsuch [wrote in 2019](#), summarizing earlier decisions.

The two inmates proposed four alternatives but declined to choose among them on religious grounds. That failure caused [Judge Stephen P. Friot](#), of the Federal District Court in Oklahoma, to remove them from a lawsuit brought by several inmates challenging the protocol.

A divided three-judge panel of the United States Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit [granted a stay of execution](#) to Mr. Grant and Mr. Jones, saying they were not required to “check a box” choosing how they were to die.

“We find nothing in the relevant case law that specifically requires a prisoner to designate a method of execution to be used in his case by ‘checking a box’ when the prisoner has already identified in his complaint the very same alternative methods given as choices on the form,” the majority wrote in an unsigned order.

In dissent, [Judge Timothy M. Tymkovich](#) wrote that inmates must do more than propose “a conditional, hypothetical or abstract designation.” An inmate must, he wrote, “designate an alternative method that can be used in his case.”

Calling the appeals court’s decision a “grievous error,” John M. O’Connor, Oklahoma’s attorney general, filed [an emergency application](#) asking the Supreme Court to lift the stay.

In [opposing that request](#), the inmates’ lawyers wrote that Judge Friot had drawn an improper distinction between prisoners willing to choose a particular alternative method of execution and those who would not.

Oklahoma has a history of [botched executions](#).

In 2014, Clayton D. Lockett appeared to moan and struggle [during an execution](#) that took 43 minutes. Doctors concluded that Mr. Lockett had not been fully sedated.

In 2015, Charles F. Warner underwent an 18-minute execution in which officials mistakenly used the wrong drug to stop his heart. Later that year, Richard E. Glossip, a death row inmate who challenged the

	<p>constitutionality of Oklahoma's lethal injection protocol before the Supreme Court, was granted a stay of execution after the state's supplier of lethal injection drugs sent prison officials the wrong drug.</p> <p>Next month, the Supreme Court will hear arguments about a Texas inmate's request that his pastor be able to touch and pray aloud with him in the death chamber.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 US sanctions 3 in Lebanon for corruption
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-imposes-sanctions-lebanese-contractors-politician-80837558
GIST	<p>BEIRUT -- The U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions Thursday on two Lebanon businessmen and a lawmaker, saying they have profited from corruption while the country struggles through its worst economic crisis in modern history.</p> <p>The two businessmen, Jihad al-Arab and Dany Khoury, are influential contractors in Lebanon who have taken over major infrastructure contracts in Beirut and other parts of Lebanon in recent years. Jamil el-Sayyed, a former security chief and a current member of parliament also sanctioned Thursday, is an ally of the militant Hezbollah group.</p> <p>The sanctions were a clear warning from Washington to Lebanon's political class that has failed to implement reforms two years after the crisis began with nationwide protests.</p> <p>The U.S. has targeted Hezbollah officials and institutions over the years and more recently imposed sanctions on politicians allied with the group. Thursday's move was rare, since it is the first time a businessman has been targeted who is not an ally of Hezbollah.</p> <p>Al-Arab, dubbed by some in Lebanon as the "contractor of the republic," is close to former Prime Minister Saad Hariri who resigned from his post in October 2019 following nationwide protests against corruption.</p> <p>The third man sanctioned, Khoury, is close to President Michel Aoun's powerful son-in-law, Gebran Bassil, who himself is under U.S. sanctions.</p> <p>The Treasury Department said each of the three have "personally profited from the pervasive corruption and cronyism in Lebanon, enriching themselves at the expense of the Lebanese people and state institutions."</p> <p>It said the three are being designated pursuant to an executive order which targets people contributing to the breakdown of the rule of law in Lebanon.</p> <p>Lebanon is being hit by its worst economic and financial crisis in its modern history in what the World Bank has described as one of the worst in the world since the 1850s. The Lebanese pound has lost more than 90% of its value and more than 70% of the population now lives in poverty.</p> <p>The crisis is mostly the result of widespread corruption and mismanagement by a political class that has run the small nation of 6 million people, including 1 million Syrian refugees, since 1990, the end of the country's civil war.</p> <p>"The Lebanese people deserve an end to the endemic corruption perpetuated by businessmen and politicians who have driven their country into an unprecedented crisis," said Director of the Office of Foreign Assets Control Andrea M. Gacki.</p> <p>The statement said that because of close political connections, al-Arab has been awarded multiple public contracts in exchange for kickback payments to government officials. It said among the contracts al-Arab won was a deal in 2016 in which he received a \$288 million from a government development arm to build</p>

	<p>a landfill after garbage filled the streets of Beirut. Three years later, the statement said, the garbage situation remained urgent.</p> <p>U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken tweeted that the sanctions are an important step in promoting accountability in Lebanon. He added that Lebanese officials “must end corruption and take urgent action to address the crises the Lebanese people face.”</p> <p>In June, al-Arab announced that he will close all his business in Lebanon, saying his companies and family are being subjected to an “illegitimate campaign of fabrications.” His announcement came days after his daughters were verbally attacked by anti-corruption protesters in Beirut.</p> <p>The Treasury Department said Khoury has been the recipient of large public contracts that have reaped him millions of dollars while failing to meaningfully fulfill the terms of those contracts.</p> <p>The U.S. agency said el-Sayyed sought to skirt informal capital controls imposed by local banks since November 2019 and was aided by a senior government official in transferring over \$120 million to overseas investments, presumably to enrich himself and his associates. The statement did not name the government official.</p> <p>El-Sayyed tweeted that he will not comment on the accusation, adding that he will be holding a news conference on Friday.</p>
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HEADLINE	10/28 Laos police seize 55.6M meth pills in raid
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/laos-reports-seizing-huge-amount-methamphetamine-80835814
GIST	<p>BANGKOK -- Police in the Southeast Asian nation of Laos have made one of Asia’s biggest-ever drug busts, seizing more than 55.6 million methamphetamine pills in a single raid. The drugs were found in the northern province of Bokeo, the state-run Vientiane Times newspaper reported Thursday.</p> <p>The drugs were found Wednesday in sacks in a house that police searched after earlier discovering 10 million tablets hidden in beer crates on a truck on its way to the capital, Vientiane, the newspaper said in an online report. Information from the truck driver led them to the house, where 65 bags of crystal methamphetamine, also known as ice, were also found, it said. Lao National Radio said they weighed a total of 1,537 kilograms (3,380 pounds).</p> <p>Two men were said to be under arrest. The newspaper said the Lao Brewery Company, the owner of the crates, issued a statement denying involvement in drug smuggling. “We are deeply disappointed that our crates have been abused as a cover for illegal activities,” it quoted the statement as saying.</p> <p>On Monday, police found 6 million amphetamine tablets hidden in a pickup truck driving through the province, the newspaper said. Bokeo borders Thailand and Myanmar and is part of the Golden Triangle, a remote geographical area with a long history of illegal drug production and smuggling.</p> <p>“The 55.6 million meth tablets and 1.5 tons of crystal meth seized in Bokeo, Laos represents around three times the tablets and a third of the crystal seized last year in the whole country. And this after other large seizures there in recent days — it’s staggering,” Jeremy Douglas, Southeast Asia regional representative for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, said</p> <p>In a report released in June, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime said production and trafficking of synthetic drugs in East and Southeast Asia have surged despite the coronavirus pandemic. It said criminal syndicates adapted to and capitalized on the situation.</p> <p>“It may seem counterintuitive, but the governance and security problems across the Mekong River in Shan are perfect for organized crime to produce and traffic big volumes,” said UNODC's Jeremy Douglas.</p>

	Laos is well known as a transit point for drugs from Myanmar, a major producer of methamphetamine, that go to Thailand, Vietnam and points beyond. Laos is a poor, sparsely inhabited landlocked country with a reputation for corruption that can facilitate smuggling. The non-governmental group Transparency International ranked it 137th out of 170 countries on its Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks countries by their perceived levels of public sector corruption.
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HEADLINE	10/28 Former NY governor charged in sex crime
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/york-gov-cuomo-charged-misdemeanor-sex-crime/story?id=80840731
GIST	<p>Former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has been charged with a misdemeanor sex crime in Albany City Court, according to a spokesman for the New York State Court System.</p> <p>The complaint, filed by an Albany County Sheriff's Department investigator, accused Cuomo of forcible touching.</p> <p>The alleged crime took place at the governor's mansion on Dec. 7, 2020, when Cuomo "intentionally and for no legitimate purpose" forcibly placed his hand under the blouse of an unnamed victim and onto an intimate body part.</p> <p>"Specifically, the victim's left breast for the purposes of degrading and gratifying his sexual desires, all contrary to the provisions of the statute in such case made and provided," the complaint said.</p> <p>Cuomo resigned in August following a monthslong investigation by State Attorney General Letitia James that found he sexually harassed 11 women, including current and former state employees.</p> <p>"Specifically, we find that the Governor sexually harassed a number of current and former New York State employees by, among other things, engaging in unwelcome and nonconsensual touching, as well as making numerous offensive comments of a suggestive and sexual nature that created a hostile work environment for women," the report said.</p> <p>Cuomo has denied all allegations of sexual misconduct or harassment. Following his resignation, he said the report was politicized and that there was a rush to judgment.</p> <p>"Let me say now that when government politicizes allegations and the headlines condemn without facts, you undermine the justice system and that doesn't serve women and it doesn't serve men or society," Cuomo said during his farewell address. "I understand that there are moments of intense political pressure and media frenzy that cause a rush to judgment, but that is not right. It's not fair or sustainable. Facts still matter."</p> <p>Hours after the criminal complaint was filed, Cuomo's attorney, Rita Glavin, said that the former governor has "never assaulted anyone" and charged that Albany County Sheriff Craig Apple's motives "are patently improper."</p> <p>"Sheriff Apple didn't even tell the District Attorney what he was doing. But Apple's behavior is no surprise given (1) his August 7 press conference where he essentially pronounced the Governor guilty before doing an investigation, and (2) his Office's leaking of grand jury information," Glavin said in a statement to ABC News. "This is not professional law enforcement; this is politics."</p> <p>Cuomo spokesperson Rich Azzopardi also said it "reeks of Albany politics and perhaps worse."</p> <p>"The truth about what happened with this cowboy sheriff will come out," Azzopardi said in a statement.</p> <p>The Albany County sheriff's office started its investigation for a criminal complaint of forcible touching on Aug. 5, and investigators "have determined that there was enough probable cause to present evidence to the court," Apple said in a statement Thursday.</p>

Albany City Court has issued a criminal summons for Cuomo to appear in court on Nov. 17, the sheriff said.

Attorney General James reacted to the filing, saying in a statement to ABC News that the "criminal charges brought today against Mr. Cuomo for forcible touching further validate the findings in our report."

Albany County District Attorney David Soares said in a statement that he was "surprised" by the criminal complaint and couldn't comment further.

The New York State Assembly suspended its impeachment investigation in the wake of Cuomo's resignation announcement. The impeachment probe was investigating sexual harassment and misconduct claims, as well as allegations the governor inappropriately used state resources to write his memoir and concerns around COVID-19 data and testing.

Cuomo was replaced by then-Lt. Gov. Kathy Hochul.

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